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The purpose of this study was to explore what it is like to be a new mother and to consider the role of appearance in this experience. The three objectives of this dissertation were: (1) to examine how new mothers use appearance to establish identity, (2) to investigate the meanings new mothers assign to appearance, and (3) to understand the role of these meanings in shaping their identities as new mothers. Substantial research exists that focuses on the experience of being a mother, and on the many physical, emotional, and mental changes that women typically experience. Yet few studies are concerned with how the identity of a new mother might be developed and conveyed through appearance and what this means in the context of new motherhood. This dissertation therefore fills a void in the academic literature by exploring the meanings assigned to appearance by new mothers and helps to deepen our understanding of the role of these meanings in the shaping of a new mother's identity.

A phenomenological approach to research was used to address the purpose of the study. Specifically, the lived experiences of first-time mothers were examined in terms of how they use appearance and consumption as a means to shape their identity during the transition to motherhood. Two methods of data collection were employed, including in-depth interviews and focus groups. A total of 24 first-time mothers were interviewed, and two focus group sessions were conducted. Data were analyzed for similarities and differences which were then used in the development of the thematic interpretation.

Three conceptual areas surfaced and are used to structure the interpretation: *New Motherhood and the Self*, *Just the Two of Us*, and *Me, Baby, and the World*. Within each area, themes that emerged through the analysis of data are interpreted and issues important to each theme are addressed. The broader conceptual and theoretical relevance of the interpretation was then considered in relation to the existing literature on the topic.

Findings indicate that many new mothers feel as though they can better navigate the transition to motherhood if they are “in control” of the experience. This notion plays itself out in the way that the new mother may dress, appear in public, and in what she consumes. In contrast, other new mothers are more ambivalent about the motherhood journey and view this transition as temporary, thereby affording them the flexibility to wear casual clothing and stay close to home. Another major finding from the study is that a new mother’s identity is fluid, rather than fixed. Most new mothers felt overwhelmed and looked to their pre-baby selves as a means of articulating their ideal postpartum selves – suggesting a disconnect between the two selves and a difficulty with expressing the new identity as “mother.” Finally, interpretation of the data reveals the extent to which the baby plays a major part in how a new mother “performs” her new role when around others. Although this study addresses major gaps in the literature, it also points to the need for further inquiry into the relationship between motherhood, identity, and consumption.

APPEARANCE AND THE TRANSITION TO MOTHERHOOD:
AN EXPLORATION OF CONSUMPTION
AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

by

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To my husband, for his patience and understanding in regards to my excessive coffee expenditures over the past three years and more than his fair share of babysitting duty. To my parents, who have always made me believe that I could do whatever I wanted to. To family and friends, who were asked at one time or another, to “just watch the kids for a couple of hours,” so that I could work on this dissertation. And finally, to Bo and Cole, for hanging in there with me during this journey through motherhood.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Approximately four million women become mothers every year in the United States alone (CDC, 2013). According to Michaels, Hoffman, and Goldberg (1982), the transition to parenthood is the most universally-occurring adult developmental transition, and one that has implications for an individual's psychological, sociocultural, and biological state. Motherhood in particular is often a life-changing experience and has bearing on a woman's identity and self-concept (Michaels & Goldberg, 1988). That is, as new mothers, women experience a transition that involves the development of a new identity: that of "mother." This identity is in part the result of the biological changes that affect her appearance and is reflected by concomitant changes in her consumption behaviors (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006).

As Sandy Gingerich, a senior partner at Eric Mower and Associates and a leader in developing strategic marketing programs for a wide range of brands states, "From the moment a woman finds out she is pregnant, the way she thinks, feels, and shops changes" (Eric Mower and Associates, 2013; Time to Earn, 2013). From early pregnancy until the child is one year old, a new mother spends approximately \$10,000, resulting in roughly \$16 billion in purchasing power (Time to Earn, 2013). Controlling more than \$2.1 trillion in household spending, mothers are often exceptionally loyal customers (All in

One Design, 2010-2011). That is, Blue Suit Mom (BSM) Media research found that 90% of mothers will purchase a brand repeatedly if the product meets expectations. Clearly, there is a critical need to understand mothers as a consumer segment, as they have tremendous purchasing power, and, if marketed to correctly, can become loyal customers (AIO Design, 2010-2011).

In one market research study conducted with mothers in the U.S., 60% of respondents think that advertisers ignore their needs and 73% do not think that advertisers and marketers understand what it is like to be a mom (AIO Design, 2010-2011). Based on the AIO study, it is clear that some consumers think that mom stereotypes are dated, and that the mothers of today are different from those of the past. As Nan McCann, president of PME Enterprises (an organization that hosts the largest marketing-to-women and marketing-to-moms conferences in the country) puts it:

I did not aspire to be a toilet paper roll changer, and I am not a joyful floor mopper. I can't identify with these images and resent marketing that makes me and other moms seem like we should happily embrace those roles (AIO Design, 2010-2011).

In addition to feeling misunderstood by marketers, a study by Walker (1998) indicated that 40% of new mothers in the US are dissatisfied with their weight. Changes in beauty routines, body weight, and issues with clothing fit are a few of the challenges that new mothers are concerned with (Bailey, 1999; Freitas, Kaiser, Chandler, Hall, Kim, & Hammidi, 1997; Nicolson, 1999). Indeed, the transition to motherhood can be especially hard for some women, with one in five women experiencing depression in the postpartum period (Gavin, Gaynes, Lohr, Meltzer-Brody, Gartlehner, & Swinson, 2005).

Postpartum depression can have devastating consequences, not only for the new mother but also for her spouse/partner and other children. With new motherhood having the potential to increase dissatisfaction with the self as well as the risk of depressive episodes (Gavin et al., 2005), it is crucial to understand this transition in a woman's life as fully as possible.

Inevitable changes in appearance, alongside an awareness of feelings of depression and dissatisfaction among new mothers suggests that this group has very specific needs and wants. A new mother faces the challenge of raising a child as well as being a "mother" – a new role for her. For this reason, it is likely that new mothers look to products - and particularly appearance-related products - to facilitate this transition. However, there is very little academic research that exists which examines the role of consumption in a new mother's experience. Thus, this dissertation explores what it means to be a new mother and the role of consumption during this important life transition.

Background

According to Phoenix, Woollett, and Lloyd (1991), the transition to motherhood is an important adult development stage, to the extent that it provides a woman a marker of identity as a woman and as an adult. Formally, the transition to motherhood begins with pregnancy and continues through the first few months after the child is born (Michaels & Goldberg, 1988). Throughout this dissertation the term *new mother* is used to refer to women who are first-time biological mothers. Accompanied by physical, emotional, and mental changes (Smith, 1999), many new mothers also experience different kinds of losses during this transitional period, especially those of autonomy,

identity, time, and friends (Lewis & Nicolson, 1998; Nicolson, 1999; Patel, Lee, Wheatcroft, Barnes, & Stein, 2005).

Identity and the Transition to New Motherhood

Becoming a new mother involves psychological, social, and physical changes in a woman (Bailey, 2001; Clark, Skouteris, Wertheim, Paxton, & Milgrom, 2009; Ogle, Tyner, & Schofield-Tomschin, 2011; Patel et al., 2005). Mentally, one woman may view her pregnancy as a confirmation of adult womanhood, while in contrast, another may perceive motherhood as more of a permanent, restrictive role (Bailey, 2001). Some women may also experience an increase in self-worth upon becoming pregnant, as this experience can be seen by some to raise one's status to adulthood (Bailey, 1999). Faced with the responsibility of taking care of a new baby, along with changes experienced in mood and body, a new mother may also experience new dimensions to existing relationships.

It is common for new mothers to experience alterations in relationships, particularly with spouses/partners. For example, Smith (1999) found that during pregnancy, a woman may turn her attention from the public world to the more local world of family and friends. In general, women with strong social relationships find the postpartum period more satisfactory than those without (Gjerdingen, Fontaine, Crow, McGovern, Center, & Miner, 2009). In fact, it has been found that close social relationships impact body satisfaction directly, in that a new mother's body satisfaction may be greater, provided she has a strong support system (Gjerdingen et al., 2009).

Moreover, Ogle et al. (2011) found that women use spousal perceptions of their postpartum bodies to navigate the changes they experience.

Perhaps the most noticeable and influential change for a new mother, aside from having a baby to take care of, is the physical change she experiences (Patel et al., 2005). Most women experience some degree of change in body size and shape during pregnancy. Specifically, they become larger. For some women, this may occur only in the stomach area; however, some women may experience weight across several areas of the body. Furthermore, changes in body shape and size do not always end during pregnancy, in as much as once a woman has a baby, she does not typically lose all of the extra weight right away. In fact, it takes some women months to lose what is often referred to as “baby weight,” and some women never lose the weight gained during pregnancy (Patel et al., 2005; Walker, 1998).

The physical changes that a woman experiences during pregnancy and after having the child affect her not only physically but also psychologically, specifically in how she views her body and concomitant changes in self-esteem, her relationships with others, and how she dresses her newly-changed body (Bailey, 1999; Gjerdingen et al., 2009; Ogle et al., 2011; Smith, 1999). In a study of how the postpartum body, particularly concerns about body size and shape, is related to self-identification, Patel et al. (2009) found that the women in their study were preoccupied with the changes in body shape and weight they were experiencing, and used these changes as reference points during the transition to motherhood. In a similar study, Clark et al. (2009) found that among their participants, depression and body dissatisfaction were highly correlated

during the postpartum period, indicating that the physical changes that a woman experiences during the transition to motherhood are common, important to understand, and have implications for how she feels about herself.

Appearance-Related Consumption and New Motherhood

Consumption and Motherhood

Globally, women spend two billion dollars annually on maternity clothing (IBISWorld, 2013) and according to Harris (n.d.), a typical middle-income family in the US will spend approximately \$12,000 on child-related expenses during the baby's first year alone. One possible reason for this high level of spending may be due to the extent to which consumption helps during transitional periods to ease discomfort and reduce role uncertainty (Guy & Banim, 2000; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). Studies have investigated the impact of motherhood on consumption practices, especially relative to issues such as time demands (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004), consuming products and services in order to feel like a good mother (Prothero, 2002), consumer vulnerability as a mother (The Voice Group, 2010), consumption as an anxiety-reducer while pregnant (Theodorou & Spyrou, 2013), maternity dress consumption (Ogle, Tyner, & Schofield-Tomschin, 2013), and the consumption of baby-related products as status symbols (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006).

Upon becoming a mother, a woman experiences a kind of time scarcity that is unlike any she has experienced in her life (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004). She is faced with the task of constantly taking care of a baby, which often does not leave time for other tasks, including shopping for herself, the child, or the family. Carrigan and Szmigin

(2004) explored how mothers feel when they are expected to fulfill home and work responsibilities within a compressed time frame. The many demands put upon new mothers by society, as well as themselves, limits the time they have to make choices in the marketplace, which is an important consideration for understanding these consumers. That is, time constraints impact the amount of time a mother has to make product decisions, to participate in the actual shopping process, and to actually use goods.

Merging the actual self with an ideal self can also be aided by consumption. Prothero (2002) took a personal subjective introspective (PSI) approach to explore consumption as a mother, and discussed how the need to appear as a “good mother” to others is often facilitated by consumption. Prothero suggested that she used consumption as a means to achieve her ideal self as “good mother,” in that she purchased and used a variety of pregnancy and baby-related products and services in the time leading up to and after having her child.

New mothers are often eager to purchase products that offer promises of being good for their babies, or that claim health and safety benefits. Such claims help to alleviate the anxiety caused by pregnancy. However, for these reasons, new mothers must also be conscious of their vulnerability in the marketplace. For example, The Voice Group (2010) illustrated how medical contexts, societal expectations, and media representations dominate the consumer market and play on a mothers’ vulnerability. The study highlights how marketers target mothers, especially new mothers, and play on their fears and insecurities as mothers in order to get them to purchase goods and services. Alongside such marketplace dynamics, a study by Theodorou and Spyrou (2013) found

that the medical industry plays on a pregnant woman's fears and insecurities in much the same way. This study focused on understanding how pregnant women acquire a sense of motherhood and alleviate anxiety via the consumption of medicalization, specifically genetic tests and ultrasound exams. It seems that as soon as a woman learns she is pregnant, she is willing to do anything to ensure the safety and health of her child, including participating in tests that are recommended to her by medical professionals, whether or not they are actually necessary (Theodorou & Spyrou, 2013).

Ogle et al. (2013) explored the consumption experiences of pregnant women, specifically in terms of maternity clothing, and found that such clothing helped shape their identities during this liminal period in three primary ways: (1) maternity clothing consumption represented disruption of the *Woman I Am Most of the Time*, (2) maternity clothing consumption affirmed one's new identity as *Pregnant/Expectant Mother*, and (3) maternity clothing consumption maintained continuity in the *Woman I Am Most of the Time*. Indeed, as Stone (1962) suggests, critical turning points in life are often marked by a change in how one dresses.

Because of the changes in body size and shape that occur during pregnancy, many women choose to purchase maternity clothing. After having the baby, other clothing changes may take place. That is, some women continue to wear maternity clothing immediately after having the baby, whereas others may be able to wear their pre-pregnancy clothing. Still others may have to purchase clothing in a new size. Indeed, there may be no other time in a woman's life when she experiences such uncertainty in regards to clothing, and as Guy and Banim (2000) found, clothing selection can be a

positive outlet in women's lives. Examining a woman's relationship with her wardrobe as a new mother is important in further understanding how she experiences this major life transition.

Consumption of symbolic products can also facilitate identity construction for new mothers. Much like the idea of buying products that signal that a woman is a "good mother" (Prothero, 2002), Thomsen and Sorensen (2006) found that new mothers often rely on other mothers for information about baby-related products. When a mother does not have the right product knowledge, it can have negative implications for her self-esteem (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006).

Motherhood and Considerations of Appearance

Appearance is an important part of one's identity (Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962), in as much as it allows us to convey an image of ourselves that we want others to see. Stone (1962) suggests that the process of conveying identity through symbols or objects includes appearing, reflecting upon that appearance, and describing one's identity in response to that appearance. The importance of appearance in shaping one's identity is no different for new mothers. In fact, it may be more important during this time in a woman's life. During transitional life stages, appearance can often be used to establish and/or shape one's identity (Stone, 1962) and therefore can help new mothers achieve a "motherly" identity. New mothers also likely use other mothers as referents for appearance-related consumption, which can influence shopping behaviors during the transition to motherhood. However, the influence that others play in the process of shaping a new mother's identity has not been fully examined in the literature. Although

some studies address the importance of relationships during the transition to motherhood (Gjerdingen et al., 2009; Ogle et al., 2011; Patel et al., 2005), there are no studies that look specifically at the influence of peers on a new mother's appearance-related consumption choices or behaviors.

The actual practice of consuming also changes in fairly drastic ways for a new mother. The physical act of shopping becomes difficult due to time restraints associated with children, challenges concerning transporting a child while shopping, and making purchase decisions for the first time (i.e., diapers, car seats, etc.). Moreover, the presence of a new baby requires the acquisition of clothing that is safe for the baby and washes well, and also requires that a new member of the family be factored into the household budget. Furthermore, a woman may forego shopping for herself altogether once becoming a mother and instead focus on shopping for her child. Such considerations are addressed by this study.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore what it is like to be a new mother and to consider the role of appearance in this experience. Preliminary qualitative research with 14 new mothers revealed several issues important to understanding how women use appearance to navigate the transition to motherhood. Specifically, the issues that emerged include changes in shopping behavior, creating a “mom” vs. “non-mom” look, feelings of guilt associated with being concerned about appearance, body image issues, and the influence of friends, family, and celebrities on post-pregnancy appearance. Participants indicated that appearance plays a major role in how they feel as mothers and

how they think others view them as mothers. Time constraints were also mentioned within the context of the other issues important to understanding appearance and the transition to motherhood, in as much as participants felt that having a child limited the time they had to shop and make consumption decisions, as well as to devote to their own appearances. Findings from the preliminary research were, in turn, used to inform the objectives of this dissertation.

Based on the data collected in the preliminary study, as well as on the available literature on the topic, three objectives were developed to guide the current study and address the research purpose. The three objectives are: (1) to examine how new mothers use appearance to establish identity, (2) to investigate the meanings new mothers assign to appearance, and (3) to understand the role of these meanings in shaping their identities as new mothers. Appearance-related consumption behaviors of new mothers are examined relative to each of the three objectives.

Although there is an abundance of biological, psychological, and cultural investigations of motherhood in the literature, thus far no studies have specifically addressed appearance and new motherhood, particularly the role that it plays in shaping a new mother's identity. Thus, this dissertation will address a major void in the literature as it expands on the topic of motherhood by examining an important dimension that has been largely overlooked.

The Methodological Framework

A phenomenological approach to exploring new mothers' experiences was used for this dissertation. Phenomenology is the most appropriate framework, as it is the study

of essences (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) and understanding the essence of the transition to motherhood is at the core of this study. van Manen (1990) suggests that the purpose behind phenomenological research is to grasp the meaning of a particular phenomenon, and Kvale (1996) states that phenomenology deals with understanding participants' lived experiences.

Because the goal of the study was to understand the lived experiences of new mothers, in-depth interviews and focus groups were used as the primary data collection methods. Data were collected from women who are first time biological mothers to children no older than six months of age. Semi-structured interviews were used as a means of data collection. As part of the interviews, I asked each participant to talk about her wardrobe and how it reflects the transition to motherhood. To facilitate this process, prior to the interview I asked each participant to select three ensembles from her wardrobe; one representing the pre-baby self, one representing the post-baby self, and one representing the ideal self.

In addition to the interviews, two focus group sessions of no more than eight women (Kitzinger, 1995) were also conducted. Based on a study by Kruske, Schmied, Sutton, and O'Hare (2004), mothers appear to enjoy sharing motherhood-related experiences as a group; therefore this data collection method allowed for the discovery of group dynamics relative to the experience of new motherhood (Kahn, Anker, Patel, Barge, Sadhwani, & Kohle, 1991).

Prior research has often used qualitative methods to investigate motherhood in terms of identity (Bailey, 1999), body image (Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997), and relationships

(Ogle et al., 2011); however, appearance has yet to be the focus of a study, and specifically one that examines new motherhood. Thus, this dissertation employs a qualitative approach in order to develop a deeper understanding of appearance within the lived experience of new mothers.

Conceptual Scope and Significance

Appearance plays an important role in establishing and shaping one's identity, especially during transitional phases, including that of becoming a mother. In addition, becoming a mother is a complex stage within a woman's life and is usually accompanied by major physical, psychological, and social changes. The importance of establishing identity as a new mother, combined with the changes she experiences, highlight the need for investigation of her appearance-related consumption practices during this critical period.

Research has focused on the transition that a new mother goes through after having a child (Bailey, 1999; Ogle et al., 2011), and on the many physical, emotional, and mental changes that she experiences (Ogle et al., 2011; Prothero, 2002), yet few studies have examined how the identity of a new mother might be shaped and conveyed through appearance. Although research concerning appearance and motherhood is limited, there is some indication that issues concerning changes in beauty routines, looking older, and fit of clothing are a few of the challenges associated with a new mother's appearance (Bailey, 1999; Freitas et al., 1997; Nicolson, 1999). Where past studies have mentioned the role that clothing plays in becoming a mother (Bailey, 1999; Nicolson, 1999), appearance is not the focus in many of these studies. Thus, it is

apparent that appearance is a relevant aspect of identity formation for this group of women and one that is in need of further exploration.

In this dissertation, Symbolic Interaction theory will be employed to anticipate how appearance is used to shape a new mother's identity. This theory suggests that people ascribe meaning to objects (e.g. clothing) and interact with each other based on those meanings (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Symbolic Interaction (SI) theory is a phenomenological-based theory in which reality is seen as socially developed through interaction with individuals who share symbols and their meanings. Herbert Blumer (1969) defined three basic premises of the symbolic interactionist perspective: (1) humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things, (2) the meanings of such things emerge from the social interaction that one has with others and society, and (3) these meanings are modified through interpretive processes used by an individual in dealing with what he/she encounters.

Some existing studies on the topic of motherhood employ SI theory (Collett, 2005; Smith, 1999). While existing research has used SI theory to examine the topics of appearance and the shaping of an identity, the role that appearance plays in shaping a new mother's identity in particular has not been explored. Moreover, SI theory has not been used to examine social interactions between new mothers and what this interaction means for the development of their identities.

The transition to motherhood not only involves the physical aspect of bringing a child into the world, but carries with it many emotional, mental, and physiological changes (Bailey, 2001; Beck, 2002). Considering the magnitude of changes that occur in

a woman's life relative to the transition to motherhood, it is a topic that requires exploration from a variety of different angles. Indeed, the transition to motherhood has been studied extensively (Bailey, 1999; Ogle et al., 2011), particularly from psychological, feminist, and health perspectives (Bailey, 2001; Clark et al., 2009; Patel et al., 2005; Sbisà, 1996). However, given the physical changes that a woman's body goes through during the period of pregnancy and post-pregnancy, it seems like a logical point of departure to consider the role of appearance in navigating the various physical, mental, and social factors of the transition. Finally, given the complex nature of dress and appearance as a means of human expression (Damhorst, 1990), it is likely to play an important role in how a woman establishes her identity as a new mother. This dissertation offers examination of such facets of the lived experience of new mothers currently absent in the literature.

Motherhood is positioned within the literature as a particular human developmental stage (Michaels & Goldberg, 1988; Phoenix et al., 1991). However, no studies specifically examine how individuals use appearance during this stage. Transitional times, such as becoming a mother, can be very turbulent, therefore understanding this transition can make navigating it easier. By focusing on the importance of appearance in dealing with transitions and exploring the many pressures women face today, results of this dissertation not only reveal the extent to which appearance shapes a new mother's identity, but help to shed light on the needs of new mothers as an important consumer market. As pointed out in this chapter, new mothers comprise a market whose needs are largely unaddressed. Thus, by doing this study I

hope to provide a deeper understanding of new mothers that may allow the industry to better satisfy their particular consumption-related needs and desires.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the topic of the dissertation and explained the purpose and objectives. The transition to new motherhood is an important time for a woman, particularly in terms of issues of identity, appearance, and consumption. A rationale for exploring these issues in more depth through a qualitative research design was therefore provided, along with discussion of the conceptual scope and significance of the study. The next chapter includes a review of the relevant literature on the topic.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes an examination of the literature related to the topic of this dissertation. This dissertation seeks to understand (a) how a woman uses appearance-related consumption to navigate the transition to new motherhood, and (b) how this consumption shapes her identity as a new mother. In the first part of this chapter, the topic of interest is positioned within a sociological framework that highlights the use of two concepts – symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy – that will help to explain what it means to become a new mother. This is followed by discussion of the literature on appearance and its use in developing, maintaining, and altering identity. Specifically, studies that examine the role of appearance and consumption during major life transitions will be explored. In the second part of this chapter, the body of literature surrounding the topic of motherhood and identity, including motherhood and consumption, is examined. Studies that explore the implications of motherhood for appearance will be addressed throughout the review, including weight issues, social connectivity, and current trends in parenting. This chapter ends with discussion of how this dissertation addresses the conceptual and empirical gaps that exist in the literature and thereby offers an in depth understanding of the topic.

A Social Psychological Framework

Theoretical perspectives stemming from social psychology help to explain how women use appearance to navigate the transition to motherhood and to shape their resulting identities. In this section, I specifically examine two such perspectives: *symbolic interactionism* and Goffman's (1959) notion of *dramaturgy*. I will also explore how the notion of the self pertains to the topic of this dissertation.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbolic Interaction (SI) theory was developed in the 1920s and 1930s (Bulmer, 1986) with much of the crucial sources of discussion emerging from sociology and philosophy, including, but not limited to: G. H. Mead, W. I. Thomas, Charles Horton Cooley, Charles Pierce, William James, and M. H. Kuhn (Solomon, 1983). The two most notable publications pertaining to discussion of this theory are Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934) and Blumer's *Man and Society* (1937). More current discussion of this theory includes writings by Erving Goffman, Scott Hunt and Kimberly Miller, Kathy Charmaz, Ken Plummer, Joel Charon, Sheldon Stryker, and Bernard Meltzer, spanning from about 1960 to the present. Contemporary application and development of the symbolic interactionist perspective has occurred within such diverse areas as nursing (Charmaz, 1983), sociology (Goffman, 1959), appearance (Hunt & Miller, 1997), and family studies (Stryker, 1972).

Mead is most often considered to be the founder of the dimensions of social psychology that created the foundation for symbolic interaction, even though credit is sometimes given to Herbert Blumer, John Dewey, and even Charles Horton Cooley

(Kuhn, 1964). Mead is credited with developing the theory of the social self, the idea that action is social, and for developing the concepts of the “I” and the “me.” Even though Mead introduced the symbolic interactionist perspective as early as the 1920s, the term “symbolic interactionism” was not coined until 1937, when Herbert Blumer wrote the article entitled *Man and Society*. A student of Mead’s, Blumer summarized the SI perspective, which is partly why Blumer is often considered its founder (Aboulafia, 2012).

SI theory is a phenomenological-based theory in which reality is seen as socially developed through interaction with others. SI theory suggests that people do not respond to this reality directly, but rather to the social understanding of this reality. Humans therefore exist in three realities, according to the SI perspective: (1) a physical objective reality, (2) a social reality, and (3) a unique reality (Charon, 2007). Consequently, according to the SI perspective, individuals and society cannot be separated from one another for two reasons: (1) both are created through social interaction, and (2) one cannot be understood without the other (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975). Behavior is not defined by forces from the environment such as drives, or instincts, but rather by reflective, socially understood meanings (Meltzer et al., 1975).

The phenomena or topics addressed by SI theory are incredibly varied and wide-ranging. Some research topics include deviance/criminology (Lemert, 1974), communication (Robinson, 2007), consumption (Schouten, 1991; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006), sexuality (Longmore, 1998), appearance/identity (Hunt & Miller, 1997), impression management (Goffman, 1959), emotions (Denzin, 1985), “who I am” (Stryker

& Burke, 2000), motherhood (Ogle et al., 2011), and product analysis (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Solomon, 1983). The majority of symbolic interaction research uses qualitative research methods, especially participant observation, to study social interaction and/or the self (Patton, 2002). Symbolic interactionism explains social behavior in terms of how people interact with each other via symbols, such as words, gestures, rules, and roles (Solomon, 1983). In this view, social structures are understood in terms of individual, one-on-one interactions, which are best interpreted via qualitative methods, or the observation of interactions.

A few of the basic concepts associated with SI theory are social acts, gestures, significant symbols, categories, symbolic environment, other, self, role taking, generalized other, and significant other (Stryker, 1959). A social act describes the behavior that someone engages in, stemming from an impulse required by an adjustment to someone else. Gestures are any parts of the act that stand for parts of the act that have yet to occur. When gestures mean the same thing to the person who implies them and to the person perceiving them, then the gestures become significant symbols. Thus, significant symbols are shared meanings. Acts, gestures, and significant symbols aid in defining the situation, which is essentially using gestures, symbols, and cues to perceive how to act in a given situation (Stryker, 1959). Generalizations of behaviors toward objects are referred to as categories and categories make up a symbolic environment, or environment mediated through symbols.

The term “other” refers to a position someone is given as reference to another position. For example, one cannot say “mother” without implying that there is a “child.”

Every position will assume a counter-position. The self can be defined in many ways, but Mead defined this term as that which is an object to itself. Likewise, Stryker (1959) suggests the self is a reflexive activity. Role-taking is anticipating the responses of others who are implicated with an individual in a social act. The generalized other is similar to a reference group and is a defined system of related roles. Finally, the significant other refers to those with whom one interacts and whose opinions matter (Stryker, 1959).

Most of the concepts associated with symbolic interactionism relate with one another in a progressive nature, meaning that the concepts essentially build on one another. Social acts occur over time and make the appearance of gestures possible. Once gestures mean the same thing to people interacting with one another, they become significant symbols. Significant symbols are grouped together based on what the symbols represent, thereby creating categories. Categories are then organized into a symbolic environment. In symbolic environments there are individuals who perform certain roles, and they become others, as there is always a counter position to any role. When individuals are put into certain positions, the self is formed as it is perceived to fit with a certain position. Role-taking refers to symbolically understanding others and the self, and anticipating responses from others. Anticipating the responses of generalized others and significant others follow (Stryker, 1959). These SI concepts are relevant to the current study, as social acts, symbolic environments, and generalized and significant others will be some of the individual topics addressed relative to the transition to motherhood and subsequent identity development process.

Dramaturgy

During the 1970s, some scholars lost confidence in SI theory, largely because of the inconsistency in concepts and relationships it presented as a theory (Stryker, 1987). However, the theory regained popularity in the 1980s, partly as a result of Goffman's relatable and understandable approach to writing on the subject (Stryker 1987). In 1959, Goffman wrote *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which provided a conceptual framework where any face-to-face encounter could be viewed in terms of a theatrical performance. Kenneth Burke (1975) is credited with first using the dramaturgical approach; however, Goffman developed a unique dramaturgical vocabulary prompting use of this approach. Included in this vocabulary are six themes: the performance, the region, discrepant roles, communication of character, teams, and impression management. Goffman was interested in how people act with one another and how their interactions could be viewed as a theatrical performance. His vocabulary is helpful in explaining how social interaction is based on self-portrayal. For example, by looking at the social interactions of new mothers and the vocabulary that they use, we can identify how they navigate social interaction and self-portrayal.

Because all human interaction and understanding happen within the context of others (Blumer, 1937; Goffman, 1959), many dramaturgical terms can be used to explore and provide insight into the process that women go through in presenting themselves to the world as a new mother. Becoming a mother is a life-altering event and many things change for a woman, including how she looks (specifically changes to her body), who she interacts with, and actions and behaviors she engages in to interact. Goffman (1959)

studied face-to-face interactions from a dramaturgical perspective and explored how seemingly unimportant interactions can be used to explain important facets of life. Thus, it is plausible that a new mother will symbolically interact with others based on her appearance, and that this interaction will help in creating and establishing her identity as a new mother.

The Self

Goffman's work was informed by notable scholars such as W. I. Thomas, Charles Horton Cooley, and George Herbert Mead. For example, Thomas's "definition of the situation" is a central concept involved in the role that one performs, how one behaves in a team, and in the general practice of interacting with others. "Definition of the situation" describes the practice of placing a particular situation in context with what is happening, who is involved, where it is happening, etc. Cooley's (1902) notion of the "looking-glass self" was also employed by dramaturgy, specifically that while we put on a performance, we are also simultaneously interpreting and thinking about how others are viewing us, and ultimately guide our actions based on these thoughts. Mead's idea of the "me" plays a role in dramaturgy as well, in that it is similar to our front stage behavior, or the part of us that is consistent in front of others most of the time. More specifically, "me" is how others know us to be.

Related to the idea of the self is the self-concept. Self-concept describes the beliefs a person holds about his or her own attributes and how he or she evaluates the self on these qualities (Solomon, 2009). One's actual self refers to who one actually is most of the time, defined by the limits which exist relative to one's skills, abilities, attitudes,

appearances or possessions (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). In contrast to this is the ideal self, which is a vision of what the actual self could be in the future, under different circumstances, or in a different setting. The ideal self is never achieved, meaning that it always remains unattainable, but is still a goal of what one's self could actually be (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Self-concept discrepancy suggests that the actual and ideal self are always in conflict, and during liminal periods, the discrepancy between the two selves is heightened (Eastburg, Johnson, & Woo, 1988). The transition to motherhood is a liminal period that seems to be a valid space to examine the notion of self-concept discrepancy.

In summary, the ways that appearance shapes a new mother's identity can be explained within a framework of SI theory, as this theory suggests that people ascribe meaning to objects (e.g. clothing) and interact with each other based on those meanings (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Indeed some of the existing studies on the topic of motherhood employ SI theory (Collett, 2005; Smith, 1999), and in particular Goffman's dramaturgical notions (Ogle et al., 2011). However, existing research that uses SI theory to explore the topic of appearance and identity has not explored the role that appearance plays in shaping a new mother's identity, specifically how new mothers interact with peers and the role that appearance plays in these interactions.

Identity and Appearance

Stone (1962) suggests that the process of conveying identity through symbols or objects includes appearing, reflecting upon that appearance, and describing one's identity in response to that appearance. Women, in particular, are primarily defined by

appearance (Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1990). Thus, women who use appearance as a means of self-realization or to convey an identity may also use it to help realize or reshape an identity as they move through role transitions like becoming a new mother. The term *appearance* will be used throughout this dissertation to refer to the total, composite image created not only by clothing, but also by the human body and any modifications to the body that are visually perceived, in addition to body language (Kaiser, 1997; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). However, brief discussion of how the term *dress* relates to appearance is appropriate, as it offers a clear example of the link between appearance and identity.

Dress provides the most immediate and apparent visual cues about an individual's characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, social status, and social roles (Damhorst, Spillman, & Michelman, 2005). Social psychologists have argued that dress is part of an ongoing process of self-realization, a process that reflects both individual and socially shared meanings (Guy & Banim, 2000). Dress is also used to express relationships, how people feel about themselves, and to communicate personal values as well as the values of the society in which one lives (Crane & Bovone, 2006; Damhorst et al., 2005). Dress can also serve as a visual metaphor for identity (Entwistle, 2001). In fact, Ruggerone (2006) suggests that clothing has a special character as a material object because of its location on our bodies, thereby “acting as a filter between the person and the surrounding social world” (pp. 354-355).

Research concerning appearance and identity has examined the meanings of dress and how those meanings influence or relate to identity (Freitas et.al., 1997; Goffman,

1959; Hunt & Miller, 1997; Kaiser, 1996; Kaiser, Nagasawa, & Hutton, 1991; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1962). In the following sections, dress and appearance as symbols and meanings will be explored, as will the concepts of identity and appearance, and how these concepts pertain to transitional periods. Finally, appearance-related consumption will be examined as it relates to shaping and communicating identity.

Dress and Appearance as Symbols and Meanings

Scholars such as Goffman (1959), Stone (1962), and Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) have explained the ways that appearance shapes identity, particularly through the notion of symbolic interaction. However, Goffman's (1959) work was unique in that he explained face-to-face interactions from a dramaturgical perspective. He suggested that we are all actors and that our interaction with others is what forms society. He also suggested that people manage their impressions through the performances they give, which can include settings, props, and costumes. Consumption can play a large role in this process of impression management, especially if the performance requires material objects like clothing in order to convince others that the role being played is authentic. Goffman conducted research on total institutions (specifically asylums), and found that when a patient is admitted, his or her unique possessions are taken away and replaced by belongings similar to everyone else in the institution. This process creates a loss of sense of self for the patient, as his or her sense of self is/was connected to the objects that are taken away. Basically, Goffman's (1959) work linked the abstract idea of symbolic interaction with concrete ideas that could be understood by many people, and has since been employed by researchers to highlight the importance of appearance in interaction.

Stone's seminal 1962 study on appearance and the self also highlighted the importance of appearance, particularly in the development of the self. Stone sought to widen the field of symbolic interaction by focusing on appearance, and did so, as this study is cited in nearly all subsequent research concerning appearance and the self or appearance and identity. One of the reasons that this article is considered seminal is because Stone explored the link between appearance and social organization, as well as that of appearance and how identities are established. According to Stone (1962), people establish, maintain, and alter their identities through communication, namely the meanings conveyed by and through appearance.

Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) built on Stone's study by developing a framework for understanding the relationship between dress and identity. The authors developed a definition for the term *dress*, discussed the functions of dress, and explored how these functions are used to create and shape identity. They also positioned dress as a communication tool during social interactions and articulated the ways that dress influences how identities are established.

Interestingly, Freitas et al. (1997) explained the flip side of using appearance to establish identities: that is, using appearance to avoid certain identities. The authors propose that the borderlines between one's identities are unstable in terms of appearance, meaning that they can blend and blur into one another. At the same time, the process of identity separation is crucial to establishing "who we are not." In other words, the identities that convey who we are can blend into one another, while the identities that do

not convey who we are must be made separate. In this study, appearance was used to explain how the border spaces of identity are navigated.

Research on appearance and identity has focused specifically on ethnicity (Forney & Rabolt, 1986; Michelman & Eicher, 1995) and women's body image (Rudd & Lennon, 2001) as related concepts. For instance, Forney and Rabolt (1986) found that ethnic identity was related to ethnic dress usage, while Michelman and Eicher's (1995) study of Kalabari women discovered how they used it to redefine the norms of dress in their society. Concerning body image, Rudd and Lennon (2001) explored the importance of body image in relation to women's appearance and aesthetics. The authors found that the body does indeed have significant meaning for individuals and that body image influences impression management behavior. Moreover, body image impacts our feelings of self-worth and social interactions, as well as shopping practices.

Current research in the area of appearance and identity is extremely varied and is often focused on specific subgroups. Examples include studies concerning appearance, identity, and men (Bakewell, Mitchell, & Rothwell, 2006; Jacob & Cerny, 2004; Kang, Sklar, & Johnson, 2011; Nelson & Hegland, 2004); adolescents (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Wooten, 2006); and subcultures, such as Goth or Punk (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Sklar & DeLong, 2012). In the study by Nelson and Hegland (2004), the process of male to female cross-dressing was examined in terms of how appearance-related products and services purchased over the Internet served to facilitate the relationship between the actual, ideal, and social self, particularly by achieving an "authentic" female identity. The study by Wooten (2006) looked at how adolescents ridicule peers concerning

appearance and the importance of material possessions in establishing identity. In Wooten's study, as well as a related study (Holt, 2004), it was found that when adolescents ridiculed their peers over material possessions, both parties' self-concept was weakened, which created a pattern of acquiring more possessions in an attempt to solve identity problems (Holt, 2004; Wooten, 2006).

A recent study of appearance and identity examined social referents (Dahl, Argo, & Morales, 2011) relative to women's shopping behaviors. This study examined the extent to which women purchased apparel based on viewing themselves in the same clothing as other women in the store. In particular, if an attractive social referent was actively consuming the same product (in this case, wearing the same product as the individual), then it resulted in a negative evaluation. Dahl et al. (2011) employed social comparison theory to highlight how negative social comparisons can influence product evaluations. This study is important to consider relative to this dissertation because it highlights the importance of comparison and identity, which may play a role in new motherhood, especially concerning comparisons made among new mothers.

Other studies that offer useful findings for this dissertation include those that examine the notion of "identity talk" relative to women's relationships with their clothing (Gregson & Beale, 2004; Guy & Banim, 2000; Hunt & Miller, 1997). Gregson and Beale (2004) relied on maternity wear to highlight how clothing circulates between women. In the study, women wore hand-me-down maternity wear or discount maternity wear while pregnant, suggesting that women may put their identity "on hold" during pregnancy by investing little symbolic meaning in their clothing. The authors suggest that women's

wardrobes therefore need to be thought of not just as containers of memory, but as a tool for clothing movement (i.e., wearing, storage and displacement). In a similar vein, Guy and Banim (2000) found that a woman's identity is encased by the use of clothing, and as such, there are three possible versions of self relative to this identity: *The woman I want to be*, *The woman I fear I am*, and *The woman I am most of the time*. The authors argue that none of the selves is more "sincere" than the others, and that the fluidity of a woman's identity is evident via her self-presentation through clothes. Hunt and Miller (1997) also examined identity in terms of women's relationships with clothing, specifically women's discourse surrounding such relationships. The authors conducted in-depth interviews with sorority women and found that most of the women possessed an ambivalent or ambiguous attitude about appearance and identity unless concrete settings were involved, such as a formal dinner, ceremony, or wedding. Their discourse on the topic of appearance in such settings was very opinionated and the women believed that rules regarding appearances in these settings were non-negotiable. For example, one woman said that it is important to look attractive when going to sorority meetings because it conveys a good image in a professional setting. Concepts such as identity talk and appearance-related discourse can be used to clarify how identity construction occurs within and across different contexts (Hunt & Miller, 1997), as well as how it can cross multiple contexts at one time, such as during major life transitions.

Identity, Appearance, and Transitions

This dissertation examines the transition to motherhood and how appearance is used in this transition to establish one's identity as a mother. Solomon (1983) states that

“product symbolism is often consumed by the social actor for the purpose of defining and clarifying behavior patterns associated with social roles” (p. 320). It is during the transition to motherhood that women may use appearance to aid in establishing, maintaining, or creating identity. For some women, becoming a mother may be seen as a shared experience. According to Turner and Turner (1978), women becoming mothers may be identified as a *communitas*, where individuals who would rarely converse in normal life mix and converse as equals, bonding over a shared experience.

Van Gennep (1960) proposed that in order to gain membership into a *communitas*, individuals must undergo important life passages, which generally consist of three phases: (1) separation, in which a person disengages from a social role or status, (2) transition, in which the person adapts and changes to fit new roles, and (3) incorporation, in which the person integrates the self with the new role or status. Turner (1969) described the transitional or liminal phase as a limbo between a past state and an emerging one, a period of ambiguity, of non-status, and of unanchored identity. Van Gennep (1960) suggested that a liminal transition is marked by instability and ambiguity, and occurs throughout one’s lifespan. Perhaps most importantly, Stone (1962) pointed out that critical turning points in life are typically marked by a change of dress.

In terms of research on body-related symbolic consumption during liminal periods, the focus has been on strategies used to improve a person’s appearance (Schouten, 1991; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982); however, there has been limited research on the role of symbolic consumption and its impact on identity during a transition wherein an improvement in the body’s appearance is not seen, such as

pregnancy (Ogle, Tyner, & Schofield-Tomschin, 2013). As a person's identity is under construction during a transitional phase, consumption can be used to ease the disconnect that occurs during liminality and to establish a new identity (Guy & Banim, 2000; Prothero, 2002; Stone, 1962; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). From a contemporary perspective, individuals experience different types of liminality, for which there exist few formal rites of passage (Turner, 1974). Although the transition to motherhood remains a major life transition that many women experience, it has not been examined in studies on transitions and appearance.

The Voice Group, an international research collective which stands for "Voicing International Consumption Experiences" (2010), posits that research related to symbolic consumption and identity construction during liminal periods can be separated into four categories: (a) consuming to manage role uncertainty, (b) consuming to achieve an ideal self, (c) consuming to cope with liminality, and (d) consuming to bridge identities. The Voice Group (2010) suggests that most research focuses on how consumption resolves identity issues; however, they also point to some of the research indicating that consumption does not truly resolve identity issues. Cody's (2012) theory of liminal consumption, for example, points out that while "fruitful" consumption can occur during transitions, so can consumption that results in frustration and confusion. For example, a new mother may be unhappy about having to buy a size or two larger than she is accustomed to, thereby causing frustration through consumption rather than resolution.

Consumption and Identity

A commonly held proposition in the literature on consumption and the self is that “we are what we have” (Belk, 1988; Tuan, 1980). Consumption that takes place for appearance management purposes represents a form of symbolic consumption, as it plays a role in shaping meanings of the self and identity (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991) and serves to assist individuals during transitional life phases. Consumption can play an especially important role in the process of creating or maintaining an identity if the identity that an individual is conveying requires material objects (e.g. clothing) in order to convince others that this identity is authentic. Furthermore, our understanding of the social world lends the expectation that an individual looks and behaves in accordance with the role being conveyed (Goffman, 1959). As discussed, Goffman (1959) posited that people perform roles in social interactions and use material objects to convey the roles being portrayed. A seminal study by Belk (1988) expands on this idea by exploring how possessions become part of the extended self. Belk’s (1988) study was concerned with linking broad notions, such as the self, identity, and consumption, together, and then brought those links to the forefront of consumer behavior research. For example, in a subsequent study that employs the extended self concept, Mehta and Belk (1991) investigated the possessions of immigrants and found that objects can represent both past and present identities, while consumption plays a key role in establishing and altering identities during times of transition. Bonsu and Belk (2003) suggest that consumption can also be used to establish future identities, even those of the deceased.

During unsettled times in a person's life, objects can become highly charged with meaning and help to organize the experience and shape the emergent identity. Items associated with behavioral rituals are particularly susceptible to this (such as items related to grooming, eating, and sleeping practices). Thomsen and Sorensen (2006) explored the use of consumption during transitional times, specifically the use of prams as a status symbol in establishing a woman's identity as mother. Important findings from the study suggest that consumption facilitates the transition between life stages by easing the discomfort and reducing the role uncertainty often associated with identity transitions, especially the transition to motherhood.

Motherhood

While the literature on motherhood is extensive, this section of the dissertation will cover topics on motherhood specific to appearance and identity. A discussion of the transition to motherhood and the many changes that women experience when becoming mothers will be covered first in this section. The topic of motherhood and identity will then be explored, especially the ways by which women identify themselves as mothers. The losses that women experience upon becoming mothers, such as independence, femininity, and time, will then be examined, followed by a discussion of postpartum depression. Literature on the topic of body dissatisfaction, as well as consumption and motherhood will then be examined. Finally, studies that investigate the importance of relationships to new mothers are discussed.

The Transition to Motherhood

The transition to motherhood, and particularly how identity is transformed during this time, has been researched in various ways (Bailey, 1999; Smith, 1999). Because the two factors occur together, both will be examined in tandem relative to this study, as in other research (Bailey, 1999; Ogle et al., 2011; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). According to Michaels, Hoffman, and Goldberg (1982), the transition to parenthood is an adult developmental transition that is universal, and is one in which psychological, sociocultural, and biological factors converge to shape the outcome of the transition. This important developmental transition includes many physical, emotional, and mental changes experienced by both men and women, but especially women (Smith, 1999). Indeed, parenthood is viewed by many to be an important facet of one's identity and self-concept (Michaels & Goldberg, 1988; Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991). Although parenthood is a major life transition for many women and men, this dissertation focuses specifically on the transition to motherhood. Michaels and Goldberg (1988) suggest that this transition spans the time period from the beginning of a pregnancy through the first few months after having the child.

One of the many changes that a woman may experience during this life transition is the way that she dresses. Depending on her pregnancy and birthing experience, a woman may go from wearing maternity to her pre-pregnancy clothing immediately, or she may have to buy a new wardrobe due to a size change after pregnancy. A woman may want a new wardrobe because of a change in personal style prompted by becoming a mother, or because of her new role, such as staying at home versus working. It is clear

that the changes in appearance experienced due to the transition to motherhood should be examined, yet have not been. For example, Ogle et al. (2013) examined how women negotiate aspects of their appearance, specifically clothing use, through symbolic consumption during pregnancy. However, as will be discussed in the next section, like other studies on appearance, the authors did not examine the period of new motherhood.

Motherhood and Identity

The transition to motherhood has been studied extensively (Bailey, 1999), especially from psychological, feminist, and health perspectives (Bailey, 2001; Clark, Skouteris, Wertheim, Paxton, & Milgrom, 2009; Patel, Lee, Wheatcroft, Barnes, & Stein, 2005; Sbisa, 1996). There is also some research on how this transition shapes a woman's identity (Bailey, 1999; Smith, 1999; Thomsen & Sorenson, 2006). Specifically, some of these studies mention the role that appearance plays in the transformation of a woman's identity when becoming a mother (Bailey, 1999; Freitas, Kaiser, Chandler, Hall, Kim, & Hammidi, 1997; Nicolson, 1999; Prothero, 2002); however, none examine in-depth the role that appearance, and clothing in particular, plays in the transition to new motherhood. For example, even though Bailey (1999) stated that the women in her study "read voraciously about pregnancy, performed exercise and relaxation routines at home, and instituted regimes of diet, drink, and lifestyle. Their clothes changed, not simply in size but in style," (pp. 343) she did not go into detail about *how* or *why* the clothes changed. Likewise, Nicolson (1999) briefly touched on the lack of time women have to take care of themselves once becoming mothers and how this can contribute to feelings of loss associated with motherhood. However, she did not expand on the topic. Prothero

(2002) developed a “personal subjective introspective” approach to exploring the consumption experiences surrounding her own journey into motherhood, yet only briefly mentioned appearance, specifically in terms of changes that occurred to her body’s shape and the need to shop for nursing bras. It is interesting that even within this personal account of the transition to motherhood, the author did not include a thorough discussion of exactly how her appearance changed.

Research concerning motherhood and identity has also focused on the ways that the transition to motherhood specifically impacts the communication of a woman’s identity (Bailey, 1999; Bailey, 2001). Bailey (1999) suggests that a woman experiences a refraction of the self once she becomes a mother, thereby creating many possible selves to explore. Specifically, with respect to appearance, Bailey (1999) found that while women “practiced” becoming mothers through dress while pregnant, their postpartum identities were not accurately conveyed by maternity clothing styles. In connection with the notion of loss, which will be discussed in the next section, a new mother loses certain parts of the self, while at the same time, creates new ones.

Indeed, the topic of motherhood and appearance is complex. New mothers are not just faced with the challenge of taking on new and different roles and identities, but they are also merging these roles and identities with pre-existing ones as women, wives/partners, and professionals (Marshall, Godfrey, & Renfrew, 2007). Because the boundaries of a woman’s roles and identities are fluid, the transition period to motherhood can be difficult as she seeks to navigate new identity terrain, some of which may not be very positive. By examining the specific changes that women experience

once becoming mothers, such as loss of sense of self, postpartum depression, and body dissatisfaction, the process of identity formation can be more clearly understood.

Losses

According to the literature, during the transition to motherhood many new mothers experience different kinds of losses, but particularly those related to autonomy, independence, identity, femininity, sexuality, time, and friends (Lewis & Nicolson, 1998; Nicolson, 1999; Patel et al., 2005). Some studies (Nicolson, 1999; Patel et al., 2005) also suggest that loss of pre-pregnancy appearance and time given to appearance are related to postpartum depression; however these studies only briefly touch on the topic of appearance. Nicolson (1999) found that the losses of autonomy and time were especially salient for how a woman feels about motherhood and can play a role in whether she will experience depression.

A study by Lewis and Nicolson (1998) found that once becoming mothers, some women feel that they lose all sense of personal or autonomous identity because they are now being defined in relation to their children. Likewise, Nicolson (1999) found that mothers experience a loss of time to devote to appearance, and that this can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression. It is important to note that this study suggested that women are actively prevented from mourning such losses associated with motherhood because of social expectations and the fact that many women unconsciously “accept” these expectations (p. 22). Moreover, Nicolson points to the irony of the popular cultural image of the new mother as happy, healthy, and energetic, when in fact the findings suggest that experiences of loss should be considered more the rule than the exception.

Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression is viewed as medically distinct from other kinds of depression, but what makes it distinct is widely disputed (O'Hara, 1997; WHO, 1992). Many researchers have found little evidence to show that postpartum depression is hormonally-based (Harris, 1993; O'Hara, 1997); however, some have found that its symptoms cannot be explained in terms of mental health alone (Dalton, 1989). Because of the lack of agreement on the exact cause of postpartum depression, it was not recognized as a distinct diagnosis by the World Health Organization or American Psychiatric Association until 1992 (Cox, 1994). Whether postpartum depression is caused by hormones or psychological factors, this illness is experienced by approximately 20% of all mothers (Hopkins, Marcus, & Campbell, 1984; WebMD, 2013). Postpartum depression is generally thought to begin anytime during the first two months of the baby's life and can involve symptoms that occur regularly even after the sixth to eighth week of a baby's life (Dunnewold & Sanford, 1994).

During the 1990s, a great deal of research was conducted on the topic of postpartum depression (Beck, 1992; Campbell & Cohn, 1991). For example, Beck (1992) conducted a qualitative study on the lived experience of postpartum depression. This candid study depicted postpartum depression as an all-encompassing and immensely difficult challenge. Findings from Campbell and Cohn (1991) suggest that certain socioeconomic indicators relate to postpartum depression, such as education level and paternal occupational level, as well as complications with pregnancy. That is, findings from the study point to higher levels of postpartum depression corresponding negatively

with lower levels of education. In addition to this, husbands of depressed women were somewhat lower in occupational status than were those of non-depressed women (using Hollingshead's 1975 9-point occupational level as a measurement), and depressed women were more likely to report pregnancy or delivery complications than non-depressed women.

Studies on the topic continued into the early 21st century (Beck, 2002; Robertson, Grace, Wallington, & Stewart, 2004). For example, an analysis by Beck (2002) explored 18 qualitative studies centered around the topic of postpartum depression and found four primary themes reflecting four perspectives on the condition: (1) incongruity between the expectations and the reality of motherhood, (2) spiraling downward, (3) pervasive loss, and (4) making gains. The first theme highlights the conflict between a woman's expectations of what motherhood should be and the reality of motherhood. Often the expectations that women have of motherhood are perpetuated by cultural notions of motherhood being a happy and blissful experience. The reality often includes feelings of sadness and unanticipated stress. The theme of spiraling downward refers to those women experiencing postpartum depressive symptoms, and the increase in these symptoms as time passes after having the baby. The theme of pervasive loss includes feelings of loss of control, self, relationships, and voice, and aligns with findings from both Nicolson (1999) and Patel et al. (2005), which suggest that losses experienced by new mothers are closely related to postpartum depression. It is important to note that the link between losses, such as those experienced in the context of appearance, and postpartum depression is an important aspect to consider but has thus far been ignored in

the literature. Finally, the theme of making gains includes surrendering to the idea of having postpartum depression, struggling to survive with the illness, and acknowledging and adjusting to unrealistic expectations of motherhood.

Studies by Nicolson (1999) and Lewis and Nicolson (1998) both found that even though the socially accepted perspective of motherhood is that a new mother is thrilled with the transition, participants in both studies experienced a different reality. In addition to suffering losses of femininity, sexuality, identity, and autonomy, the women felt that they could not adequately mourn these losses because the social expectation to be a “happy” new mother is so powerful. Further, Lewis and Nicolson point to the negative connotations of postpartum depression, finding that participants preferred not to talk about it using clinical or medical terms (e.g. postpartum psychosis, postpartum depression). Instead, participants used terms like the “baby blues” when discussing their feelings, as this terminology reduced the perceived severity of the condition (Lewis & Nicolson, 1998). Although several contributing factors were revealed, for most of the women in the study, body dissatisfaction emerged as a primary cause for their feelings of depression.

Body Dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction can be described as one facet of body image relating to dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the body (Gjerdingen, Fontaine, Crow, McGovern, Center, & Miner, 2009, p. 192). For obvious reasons, the concepts of body image and body satisfaction have been extensively researched relative to motherhood (Clark et al., 2009; Gjerdingen et al., 2009; Patel et al., 2005), and it seems that changes in body shape

and weight are important considerations for most women experiencing the transition to motherhood (Patel et al., 2005). Clark et al. (2009) examined the relationship between depression and body dissatisfaction during pregnancy and the first postpartum year. The authors found that most women adapted well to body changes during pregnancy but experienced body dissatisfaction during the postpartum period. It was found that body dissatisfaction in late pregnancy is related to postpartum body dissatisfaction (Clark et al., 2009; Gjerdingen et al., 2009) and body dissatisfaction increases from one to nine months postpartum, depending on predictors such as increased weight gain, non-breastfeeding status, and the number of close family relationships (Gjerdingen et al., 2009).

Gjerdingen et al. (2009) conducted a study on predictors of postpartum body dissatisfaction and found that it has a negative effect on mental health. In conjunction with this, findings suggest that women with eating disorders are more vulnerable to depression during the postpartum period and have greater difficulty accepting their postpartum bodies than women without eating disorders. Patel et al. (2005) suggest that the former also experience greater difficulty with establishing an identity as a mother (Patel et al., 2005). As Gjerdingen et al. (2009) discovered, a reciprocal or bi-directional relationship exists between body dissatisfaction and depression, in as much as it is not known whether body dissatisfaction causes depression or if depression leads to body dissatisfaction.

The relationship between pre-pregnancy and postpartum attitudes and behaviors among women has also been explored (Devine, Bove, & Olson, 2000). In general, it is believed that a woman's lifestyle and health attitudes before pregnancy determine her

postpartum attitudes and behaviors. For example, if a woman is healthy and feels satisfied with her body before pregnancy, she will typically remain so during the postpartum period. If a woman is not healthy and is dissatisfied with her body prior to pregnancy, she will most likely revert back to this state in the postpartum period, even if she becomes healthy during the pregnancy. However, Devine et al. (2000) also found that those women who spent large amounts of time and energy in formal exercise prior to pregnancy were more likely to be at risk for retaining weight in the postpartum period. Along with the extensive time and energy required for formal exercise, physical limitations and taking care of a baby make it difficult to continue these activities in the early postpartum period, thereby putting these women at greater risk for retaining weight.

Some research has investigated the influence of others on perceptions of the body among postpartum women, finding that spouses influence this perception in that most husband-wife interactions concerning the body are positive and supportive during the postpartum period (Ogle et al., 2011). According to Ogle et al. (2011), women experience both negative and positive feelings toward the postpartum body, and they use their husbands as “looking-glasses” in the redefinition of the self during the transition to motherhood.

As previously mentioned, concepts related to body image, such as body satisfaction and dissatisfaction, have been studied in regards to motherhood (Clark et al., 2009; Fox & Yamaguchi, 1997; Gjerdingen et al., 2009; Nicolson, 1999). The United States has the largest population of overweight and obese adults (Shao & Chin, 2011); however, in Western societies, attractiveness ideals are perpetuated through the media

and often these ideals come in the form of thin models and messages about physical attractiveness geared toward women (Darlow & Lobel, 2010). Thus, right alongside a population that is growing increasingly larger, the media still pressures women to be thin in order to be attractive. Consequently, even though there is a good reason why a new mother may be heavier than she once was, she may still feel pressure to lose the weight quickly, given the intense cultural focus on reducing obesity and being thin, especially among “celebrity moms.”

There are many studies suggesting that exposure to images of thin celebrities has a negative impact on body satisfaction (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2011; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004); however, other studies have found that such exposure has no impact on body satisfaction (Champion & Furnham, 1999; Martin & Kennedy, 1993). For instance, Gow, Lydecker, Lamanna, and Mazzeo (2012), confirmed that pregnancy is a prevalent topic on popular celebrity web sites; however, relatively few articles specifically discussed weight (13%) with more focusing on shape (30%). This study also pointed out that every article about a celebrity pregnancy was accompanied by a celebrity photograph, which sends an implicit message about what the ideal pregnant or postpartum woman should look like.

In a similar vein, postpartum body dissatisfaction among celebrities is rarely discussed (Walker, 1998). This absence is clearly in contrast with the experience of the average new mother in the U.S., 40% of whom report weight dissatisfaction (Walker, 1998). A number of factors likely contribute to this discrepancy. First, celebrities have access to personal trainers, nutritionists, chefs, and childcare, assistance that the average

woman cannot easily afford. Further, it is the job of most celebrities to appear attractive. Thus, unlike most women, they can dedicate a significant proportion of their time and resources to the pursuit of the thin ideal (Walker, 1998).

Longhurst (2005) proposed that since the early 1990s, societal expectations for pregnancy have shifted such that modern expectant mothers in the West have increased opportunities “to do” pregnancy fashionably. Mothers today are immersed in a cultural context in which pregnant celebrities are praised for their up-to-the minute style and in which pregnancy is no longer viewed as a viable excuse for not looking fashionable (Martindale, 2012). Indeed, some women are even concerned that if they do not wear maternity clothing, their “baby bumps” might be read as big stomachs (Ogle et al., 2013). Thus, body dissatisfaction not only plays an important role in the transition to motherhood, but in some cases it is managed through consumption of specific clothing as a means to communicate the “right” cultural message (e.g., I’m pregnant, not overweight).

Consumption and Motherhood

Tuan (1980) posits that we are what we have and possess. Belk (1988) took this notion further to suggest that this idea is perhaps the most powerful and fundamental fact of consumer behavior. However, this is not a new idea, in that Allport (1937) suggested that from infancy, a person constructs his or her identity and self-esteem via the continuous possession of things. Likewise, Sartre (1943) proposed that individuals seek to possess things in order to extend the sense of self. That being said, framing the experience of understanding new motherhood within consumption is very important.

Indeed, as a consumer group, mothers have tremendous purchasing power, and, if marketed to correctly, can be very loyal customers (AIO Design, 2010-2011).

According to Susan Gingerich of EMA's (Eric Mower & Associates) New Moms Group, every year a new mother spends \$10,000 from the time she learns she is pregnant until her child is one year old, resulting in \$16 billion in consumer purchasing power ("Time to Earn," 2013). As mentioned in Chapter I, mothers control more than \$2.1 trillion in household spending and can be exceptionally loyal customers. Indeed, a report by BSM Media indicated that 90% of moms will stay with the same brand if the product meets their expectations and will purchase the same products and brands for both home and office (Bailey, 2008).

According to Theodorou and Spyrou (2013), in the contemporary world neither motherhood nor babyhood can be fully grasped without looking at the essential role of consumption in relation to both. It is within the "common culture of motherhood" (Thomson, Kehily, Hadfield, & Sharpe, 2012, p. 8) that women feel called upon to be good at being mothers. In fact, according to Douglas and Michaels (2004),

Everyone watches us, we watch ourselves and other mothers, and we watch ourselves, watching ourselves...Intensive mothering is the ultimate female Olympics. The competition isn't just over who's a good mother – it's over who's the best. (p. 6)

As discussed previously, literature on consumption and new motherhood is an area in need of further exploration for several reasons. For example, existing research does not acknowledge the role that children play in consumer culture, including indirectly through the mother during pregnancy (Cook, 2008). That is, as Cook (2008) points out,

when babies come into the picture, the focus of consumption shifts from being an individualistic act by an autonomous, independent consumer, to a relational one that involves diverse interactions, social contexts and subject positions all placed within an overall discourse of caring (for the unborn baby or family) where the mother's consumption choices are made with others in mind.

Theodorou and Spyrou (2013) argue that it is principally through consumption that a pregnant woman comes to act out her emerging role as mother, both for herself and for others, whether it is the baby, her family and friends, or society at large. Moreover, anxiety caused by the need to appear as a “good mother” leads to attempts to make the “right” choices, or those choices that allow her to reduce that anxiety and be accepted in the desired social group of “good mothers.” Marketers take advantage of this anxiety by associating being a “good mother” with specific products and services, thereby suggesting to mothers that the way to becoming a “good mother” is through consumption (Voice Group, 2010).

When an individual's identity is under construction, as it is during a transition like motherhood, consumption can be used to achieve stability and to ultimately complete the new identity (Guy & Banim, 2000; Prothero, 2002; Stone, 1962; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). However, though consumption among mothers has become increasingly studied, research in this area is still lacking (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004; Prothero, 2002; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). Some studies that focus on motherhood and consumption indicate that time is a major constraint when shopping as a mother, and that the entire consumption process changes upon entering into motherhood (Carrigan & Szmigin,

2004; Prothero, 2002; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). Specifically, Carrigan and Szmigin (2004) found that time and the uncertainty of time scarcity during the pregnancy period has an impact on consumption among expectant mothers, in that they are starting to realize that the consumption process will be completely different once they become mothers. Although their study focused on expectant mothers, the researchers noted that studies are needed on the nature of the consumption decision process specifically among new mothers.

Thomsen and Sorensen (2006) discovered that consumption can ease discomfort during the transitional phase of becoming a mother. The authors examined the symbolic significance of prams in Denmark and how brands and the advertising of them tap into Danish constructions of motherhood. It was found that consumption (in this case, consumption of prams) helps reconstruct identities and display social and financial status. An interesting finding is that a woman who did not fully understand or decode commonly shared meanings about prams did not view herself as becoming and being recognized as the kind of mother she wanted to be. For example, if a new mother was not aware of a certain type or brand of pram (typically high-end), this often prompted her to feel out of touch as a mother or not as knowledgeable as she would like to be (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). In addition, the study revealed the extent to which the pressures of consumer culture influence parents, particularly the idea that consumption of high-end products makes for better parenting. Perhaps most important however, is that this study further supports the notion of liminal consumption, which suggests that consumption eases the discomfort of liminality or transitional phases and reduces the role uncertainty that

typically occurs with identity construction. That is, consuming the “right” products helps an individual create an authentic identity and play the new role in a convincing way (Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006).

In a similar vein, Prothero’s (2002) study detailed her own experiences with the consumption-related elements of motherhood, wherein she discusses experiences similar to those described in the literature, specifically a tendency to consume products that she felt made her look like a “good mother” in other’s eyes. However, she also discovered that because of this need to be seen as a “good mother,” the consumption choices that she had to make for herself and the baby created feelings of anxiety.

Indeed, not only do women experience greater anxiety about their consumption choices, but Yorgey (2000) suggests that because of the perceived importance of this life change, women also tend to increase their consumption of products in general, especially those related to motherhood. This is an important point, in as much as Walter (2012) suggests that mothers represent a \$2.4 trillion market. However, many of the products that a woman purchases as a mother are quite different from those she purchased before motherhood (Yorgey, 2000). In fact, Carrigan and Szmigin (2004) found that women tend to change their consumption behaviors as they prepare to become mothers, as motivations for consumption as well as the types of products consumed change even while they are expecting. Moreover, the influence of others on consumption may change, having consequences for how and what a new mother consumes. For example, Collett (2005) found that some women use well-dressed and nicely groomed children to confirm an identity as a “good mother.” Not only do mothers consume products to appear in a

certain light, but such findings indicate that they may even use their children as vehicles to do so.

A study by Ogle et al. (2013) examined the symbolic consumption of maternity dress among expectant mothers. The authors found that women struggle to make decisions about maternity dress, pointing to the ways that products both enable and constrain the transition to the role of mother. Findings from this study also point to the notion that consumption practices are tightly bound with the participants' identities, which, in turn, represent a repertoire of possible selves that often diverge from current identities. A particularly interesting finding was that many participants experienced ambivalence toward maternity dress, perhaps because most wore hand-me-down maternity clothing or purchased maternity wear from discount stores. Most of the participants were middle-to upper-middle class, and this self-imposed frugality represented a contrast to typical dress consumption patterns, which included wardrobes that were comprised of relatively deep stocks of clothing that participants felt reflected their personal aesthetics and identities. As a result, wearing hand-me-down or discount maternity clothing, rather than store bought, full-priced clothing reflected a disconnect between participants' actual and ideal selves (Ogle et al., 2013).

According to Ogle et al. (2013) some participants celebrated their pregnant bodies by dressing in body-skimming maternity clothing, as the symbolic embodiment of mature, feminine sexuality. In contrast, others delayed the purchase of maternity clothing, as if to distance the self from the pregnancy (Ogle et al., 2013). The authors suggest that the liminality of pregnancy does not represent the potential for an inevitable

transformation, but rather a suspension of identity, whereby participants focus on returning to the pre-pregnancy bodily state and identity. However, because the study focused on pregnant women rather than new mothers, it does not address the matter of what happens to the body or to identity after pregnancy.

It would be beneficial to researchers, industry professionals, and consumers alike to explore the shopping behaviors of the new mother, including whether or not she uses different channels, and whether her preference in brands and styles change once becoming a mother. According to a Euromonitor International (2010) study, new mothers are a skeptical, critical, and demanding group of consumers, and it would benefit everyone to understand this large group more thoroughly. Further, mothers (and fathers) are spending money on more expensive products for their children rather than themselves (Euromonitor International, 2010), thereby suggesting a shift in overall consumption patterns among parents.

Although it has been established that consumption helps shape identities during transitional periods like motherhood (Guy & Banim, 2000; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006), how it does this is still rather unclear. For example, what exactly helps a new mother establish her identity? Is it changes in shopping behavior? Changes in style or brand preferences? Changes in product categories? Alongside the need for exploring specific acquisition practices, consumption usage also needs more in-depth investigation. Examining what new mothers wear in various settings and when they are around different people would shed light on what appearance says about the experience of new motherhood. For example, a new mother may wear one type of clothing to run errands

and another to go shopping with a friend. A new mother may dress differently when she is around other mothers compared to when she is with friends that do not have children. The way that a new mother uses appearance to adapt to specific situations may highlight the particular social pressures that she faces during this time in her life.

One important trend seen among new mothers is called “attachment parenting.” Attachment parenting is based on seven concepts, including (1) birth bonding, (2) understanding a baby’s cries, (3) breastfeeding, (4) baby-wearing, (5) bedding close to baby, (6) balance and boundaries, and (7) being cautious of baby trainers (Sears & Sears, 2003). Baby-wearing is an area of particular interest to this dissertation, as it entails using a sling or other baby-carrying device to keep the baby as close to the mother’s body for as much of the time as possible. In terms of appearance, this trend has two implications: (1) wearing a baby creates a particular appearance in and of itself, and (2) what is worn under the baby carrier has to be considered in terms of functionality and comfort. Thus far, there are no studies discussing this trend, even though there are many books detailing the benefits of baby-wearing and the various methods of practicing this trend (Mercer, 2006; Sears & Sears, 2003).

Another trend in parenting is an increased prevalence of breastfeeding among new mothers. The Centers for Disease Control (2013) reports that 77% of infants start out breastfeeding at birth, with 49% breastfeeding at six months, and 27% continuing to do so at one year. In 2007, lower percentages were seen for each category, with 74% of infants breastfeeding at birth, 42% at six months, and 21% at one year. With this increase in the number of mothers who are breastfeeding, several issues concerning

appearance come to the fore, including clothing worn to aid in the practice of breastfeeding, such as nursing bras and shirts, as well as how breastfeeding influences feelings associated with the size and shape of the body.

Research in the area of consumption and motherhood has not just looked at product consumption, but has investigated the consumption of knowledge about pregnancy and motherhood (Theodorou & Spyrou, 2013; Voice Group, 2010). For example, a study by The Voice Group (2010) explored the marketplace interactions of expectant and new mothers as they navigated the new consumption space of motherhood, particularly the enormous amount of advice available from guidebooks, parenting Web sites and magazines, public bodies, and advertising. This information overload has been found to increase stress levels among expectant mothers (O'Malley, Patterson, & Ni Bheachain, 2006). In fact, according to Douglas and Michaels (2004) over 800 books on motherhood were published between 1970 and 2000 alone. Thus, the new experience of pregnancy and childbirth, both physically and emotionally, leaves many women in a state of insecurity and uncertainty and open to potential exploitation by the marketplace (Voice Group, 2010).

Also important to consider are the strong cultural messages about mothering that promise a lifestyle that will prove to be not only fun and good, but that will also blend effortlessly with the other facets of “the good life,” including work, leisure, relationships, sex, and so forth (Maushart, 1999). Contemporary images of motherhood communicated via the media set up an ideal that is hard for many women to attain and which erodes the relief from the slim images of attractiveness that pregnancy traditionally offered women.

Indeed, maternity clothing websites and advertisements generally depict expectant mothers with a four to five month bump rather than one of the later, larger stages of pregnancy (O'Malley et al., 2006).

Other studies in this realm have explored such topics as the growth and increasing dominance of organic lines in the ready-prepared baby foods sector, thereby reducing mothers to the role of “navigating the brandscape” (Davies, 2006). Hamilton and Catterall (2006) revealed that low income mothers felt compelled to buy their children expensive branded clothing to allow them to fit in with peer groups and avoid suffering further stigmatization. Given the importance of brands among new mothers, marketers should be encouraged to further aid in providing this consumer group with goods and services to meet their demands.

In a general sense, findings of studies on consumption and motherhood point to the fact that becoming a mother is a very private experience, yet it is an experience that is enacted in a very public way. Thus, the social interactions that new mothers engage in and the influence of these interactions on appearance, appearance-related consumption, and on the shaping of their identities as mothers is important to consider.

Importance of Relationships

Recently, the importance of relationships has been examined in the literature concerning motherhood and identity (Gjerdingen et al., 2009; Ogle et al., 2011; Patel et al., 2005). Gjerdingen et al. (2009) found that fewer immediate family relationships may be a predictor of higher levels of body dissatisfaction, suggesting that close social relationships may positively impact a new mother's body satisfaction. As discussed

earlier, Ogle et al. (2011) found that women use spousal interpretations of their bodies during and after pregnancy to understand their own bodies and that, overall, husband-wife interactions were positive and supportive during the postpartum period. Finally, Patel et al. (2005) suggest that women with eating disorders prior to pregnancy and who have close relationships with their spouses may be less vulnerable to depression during the postpartum period than those without such close relationships.

While spousal and immediate or close family relationships have been studied in terms of becoming a new mother, there has been little to no research exploring the impact that social referents have on a new mother's perceptions of her postpartum appearance. Dahl et al. (2011) suggest that women use other women as reference points in gauging appearance, so it would seem appropriate to examine the role of social referents relative to a new mother's perceptions of her appearance. The role of others in the tendency to compare one's body with that of others comprises a major part of the body image and identity literature. For instance, employing Festinger's (1954) notion of social comparison, Lin and Kulik (2002) found that social comparisons with a single, thin peer were sufficient to significantly reduce a woman's satisfaction with her body. In this same study, it was suggested that women may compare themselves with peers more frequently than with media ideals because there is more frequent exposure to and opportunity for comparison with peers. Moreover, peers may be considered more relevant for self-evaluation and therefore actually preferred for comparison (Lin & Kulik, 2002). Likewise, a meta-analytic review of social comparison as a predictor of body dissatisfaction by Myers and Crowther (2009) found that comparison on the basis of

appearance is related to greater levels of body dissatisfaction, demonstrating the importance of others in women's evaluations of their own bodies.

Tendencies to make appearance comparisons have also been shown to be predictors of body concerns among young women (Durkin, Paxton, & Sorbello, 2007; Jones, 2001; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004), as well as the increased importance of body weight, shape, and "feeling fat" in late pregnancy (Skouteris, Carr, Wertheim, Paxton, & Duncombe, 2005). In a study by Rallis, Skouteris, Wertheim, and Paxton (2007), it was found that the tendency to compare one's body with others at six weeks postpartum highlighted the importance of weight/shape and predicted "feeling fat" at one year postpartum. Moreover, Paloma (1972) suggests that women evaluate their efforts as mothers based on a comparison between what they do and the subjective interpretation of what the "average mother" does. Consumers live in a crowded media environment, but one that makes for a constantly collaborative world (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). New mothers are no different from other populations, in that they connect with friends, family, and the world at large via social networking sites, TV, magazines, and the Internet in general. Due to the seemingly important and prevalent nature of comparison among women, the influence of others on the appearance of new mothers is a topic that needs to be more thoroughly explored.

Conceptual and Empirical Gaps

As discussed throughout the previous two sections, while there has been a great deal of research on motherhood and mothers in general, there remain many gaps relative to the topic of this dissertation. For example, even though there is much knowledge

about the transition to motherhood, the role of postpartum depression, and how body dissatisfaction emerges in the postpartum period, there is still much we do not know about the role that appearance plays in becoming a new mother. Furthermore, extant research does not address the initial transition to motherhood, the relationship between body dissatisfaction and appearance, the influence of peers on a new mother's appearance, or the specific consumption changes that occur for a new mother. Finally, becoming a mother can also result in a shift in wardrobe, in as much as it may be in continuous fluctuation during this time, depending on weight gained during pregnancy, weight loss after having the baby, and style or brand changes once becoming a mother.

As described in Chapter I, the three objectives guiding this dissertation are: (1) to examine how new mothers use appearance to establish identity, (2) to investigate the meanings new mothers assign to appearance, and (3) to understand the role of these meanings in shaping their identities as new mothers. Appearance-related consumption behaviors of new mothers are examined relative to each of the three objectives. Each objective addresses areas in the literature where gaps have been identified. For example, research has established that a person's identity is under construction during life transitions, and that consumption can be used to navigate such transitions and establish identity (Guy & Banim, 2000; Schouten, 1991; Stone, 1962; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). Moreover, it has been established that consumption helps shape identities during transitional periods like motherhood (Guy & Banim, 2000; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). However, how it is that consumption does this is still unclear. Likewise, as discussed earlier, past studies have only superficially addressed the role that appearance plays in

becoming a mother (Bailey, 1999; Nicolson, 1999). That is, if the topic is mentioned, it is done so only briefly and in passing, with little discussion of the meanings of appearance as a part of becoming a mother. Thus, the first objective of this dissertation, to examine how new mothers use appearance to establish identity, addresses this void in the literature by examining appearance-related consumption behaviors during this time. Moreover, this gap is addressed by framing the topic within symbolic interaction, which has not been used to examine how appearance plays a role in establishing identity among new mothers. By exploring this topic within a symbolic interaction framework, this dissertation will contribute to research in the areas of both motherhood and appearance.

Understanding the meanings that new mothers assign to appearance and how such meanings pertain to their identities as new mothers (the second and third objectives of this dissertation) also help to address several of the gaps that exist within the literature. Specifically, even though as a topic motherhood has been studied extensively (Beck, 2002; Lewis & Nicolson, 1998), there are several areas within this topic in need of more attention. For example, several studies have focused on the expectant mother's identity (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004; Ogle et al., 2013; Smith, 1999; Theodorou & Spyrou, 2013), while very few have focused on the first few months of the new mother phase. One reason why it is important to understand the experiences of new mothers in the first few weeks or months after having a baby is because of appearance-related changes that occur during this time, and the implications of those changes for identity and consumption. For example, some women may still wear maternity clothing immediately after having a baby, whereas other women may be able to wear their pre-pregnancy clothing. Still

others may have to purchase clothing in a larger size due to weight retention. There may be no other time in a woman's life that she will experience such uncertainty in regards to clothing as she does during the period immediately following having a baby. Yet much of the information available on this topic comes in the form of popular press books or through the hundreds of Internet "mom-blogs" that exist. Most of these books and blogs describe how to look like a "hot" mom (Min, 2012), how to dress like a fashionable mom (Maizes, 2011), and how important it is not to wear "traditional mom" clothes (Fiendell, 2012). For instance, while discussing commonly-held notions about what today's mothers are supposed to look and act like, one blogger stated "Moms are supposed to look put together" (Baker, 2013). Clearly, the topic of appearance is of importance to new mothers, but there is little explanation as to why or how it is important to them in this new role. This dissertation therefore fills a void in the academic literature by exploring the meanings assigned to appearance by new mothers and helps to deepen our understanding of the role of these meanings in the shaping of a new mother's identity.

In summary, substantial research exists that focuses on the experience of being a mother, and on the many physical, emotional, and mental changes that women typically experience. Yet few studies are concerned with how the identity of a new mother might be developed and conveyed through appearance and what this means in the context of new motherhood. By specifically examining how appearance is used to traverse the transition to motherhood, and by doing so within a symbolic interaction framework, this dissertation ultimately helps to shed light on what it means to be a new mother.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the literature pertinent to the topic. I began with an overview of symbolic interaction and discussion of its potential use relative to the topic of appearance and motherhood. Literature exploring the concepts of identity and appearance was then examined, as was the broad topic of motherhood. Gaps that emerged in the literature were then discussed as a means to highlight the need for this study. In the next chapter, I present the research design employed in the dissertation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study is to explore what it is like to be a new mother and to consider the role of appearance in this experience. To that end, this study examines the role that appearance plays in establishing a woman's identity as a new mother by asking the questions: *What is it like to become a mother? And what is the role of appearance in this experience?* As seen by the review of literature presented in the previous chapter, it is evident that there is a need for investigation of the role of appearance in the transition to motherhood. Literature on motherhood spans from topics of postpartum depression to consumption, with very little focus on appearance. Likewise, the transition to motherhood has been examined in terms of how it impacts a woman's identity and the kinds of losses that she suffers during this transition, yet few studies investigate how appearance enters into this experience.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of phenomenology and the advantages of using this research approach for this dissertation. This is followed by a discussion of data collection, including the specific methods that were employed. The participant sample is then explained relative to the methodological goals of the study. Finally, the approach to data analysis and interpretation of data are discussed.

Exploring Lived Experience through Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a complex system of ideas primarily associated with the works of such philosophers as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Employed in research, it is about the intuitive grasping of the essences of phenomena (Hultgren, 1989; Jax, 1989). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), phenomenology focuses on the essence or structure of an experience and the meanings of that experience that one understands through a particular phenomenon. This approach relies on the participants' and researchers' firsthand experiences of the phenomenon to depict the essence of it, which, according to Husserl, reveals those meanings and structures that are taken for granted in everyday life (as cited in van Manen, 1990).

One key aspect of phenomenology articulated by Husserl that has since been reframed for use in research is the need to understand the phenomenon from a first person perspective (van Manen, 1990). Husserl posited that we should try to explain and describe things through the individual's perspective. Heidegger (1962), a student of Husserl, argued that to be human is to be interpretive, and that understanding is the basic form of human existence; it is the way we are. Heidegger (1962) also suggested that phenomenological research seeks to link hermeneutics with phenomenology, while Gadamer (1975) posits that hermeneutic phenomenology is the fusion of horizons between text and researcher. When employed in the research process, data obtained can be converted to text by the researcher/interpreter in order to compare experiences and arrive at an understanding of the phenomenon.

A phenomenological approach to interpretive research entails the attentive practice of thoughtfulness and search for what it means to be human (van Manen, 1984). Moreover, the study of lived experiences and essences is a poetizing activity, meaning that this type of research should be an expression of the essence of something and should flow, in terms of the research process and writing (van Manen, 1990). According to van Manen (1990), the goal of phenomenological research is to capture new awareness or knowledge about lived experience. Further, as Hultgren (1989) suggests, we want to develop a deeper understanding of what individuals go through in everyday life. Applied to this dissertation, the goal of using the phenomenological approach is to come to a deeper understanding of the lived experience of motherhood, specifically the experience of becoming a mother for the first time.

Phenomenology asks *What is this experience like?* (van Manen, 1997). As a research approach, it does not seek to explain or control the world, but rather to offer more insightful descriptions of the way the world is experienced so that individuals understand through direct contact as opposed to objective testing (van Manen, 1984). Thus, questions that penetrate to the core of everyday life concerns that are often taken for granted are a necessity (Hultgren, 1989). Ultimately, the aim of phenomenology in research is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence (van Manen, 1990). To do this one must also understand the underlying assumptions of this type of research. The interpretive ontology suggests that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed by individuals (Merriam, 1998). These assumptions influence the way a researcher chooses to view the world, and, in turn, what he or she believes

knowledge is and how to obtain it. In this dissertation, I examined the phenomenon of becoming a new mother through the experiences, or realities, of women. I also considered the role of appearance relative to these experiences. That is, how each woman uses appearance, whether through clothing, makeup, fitness, etc., during the transition that she is experiencing and what it means for the development of her identity as a mother. Thus, by interpreting the lived experiences of women actually going through the transition to motherhood for the first time, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of becoming a new mother was developed.

Data Collection

Methods

Interpretive approaches to research seek to offer in-depth insight into an experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). One of the best ways to gain deep understanding of an experience is to use a multi-method approach to data collection that allows the researcher to have multiple points of contact with the participants (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, by using multiple data collection methods, the findings of the study are strengthened (Kvale, 1996). In this study, two specific methods were used to collect data: (1) in-depth interviews and (2) focus groups. Both are discussed in the following sections.

In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interview is an important data collection method for a study such as this because it allows the story of a participant's lived experience to emerge (Kvale, 1996). In-depth interviews also can provide insightful data that cannot be gathered using

other, less interactive research methods (McCracken, 1988). Known as a “conversation with a purpose” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), interviews focus on the participants’ lived experiences, while allowing the researcher to play an active role in identifying unique experiences, inconsistencies, implications, and assumptions that come about during the course of the conversation (McCracken, 1988).

According to the literature on the interview method, there are three basic types of interviews that a researcher can use: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and informal interviews. Structured interviews follow detailed guides and questions and are often thought of as “oral surveys” (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interviews include some structured questions, but also have flexibly-worded questions that make the interview more like a conversation (Merriam, 1998). Informal interviews have little structure, with questions evolving during the interview. In this dissertation, I utilized the semi-structured interview to gather data. In the case of semi-structured interviews, it is recommended that easy to answer, unobtrusive questions be asked at the beginning of an interview to establish good rapport with the participant, with more in-depth questions falling towards the middle of the interview, and personal or sensitive questions placed at the end of the interview in the hopes that trust has been established between researcher and participant (Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This approach was employed in the development of interview questions for this study.

Specific interview questions to be used in this study were developed based on the literature in the areas of identity, appearance, and motherhood, and on the data collected for the preliminary study. Questions cover topics ranging from the importance of

clothing in general, to the initial transition to motherhood and changes in consumption, to body satisfaction and the influence of others on appearance (see Appendix A: Interview Schedule). Questions include probes as a means to prompt clarification or more detail. For example, one interview question prompts the participant to discuss the last clothing purchase she made. The probes that follow this question are “What did you buy? Where did you buy it? Why did you buy it?” The context of these purchases, along with reasons for purchasing, helped to frame an understanding of the way that each new mother uses clothing consumption to create her identity in this role.

During the interview, I asked each participant to talk about her wardrobe and any changes she has made to it during the transition to motherhood. To facilitate this process, prior to the interview I asked each participant to select three ensembles from her wardrobe: one representing the pre-baby self, one representing the post-baby self, and one representing the ideal self. Participants were asked to consider all elements of each ensemble, including shoes as well as makeup and accessories. Specific questions were asked about each ensemble, such as *Do you dress differently now than before you were a mother?* and *Have your expectations of clothing changed, now that you are a mother?* (see Appendix A: Wardrobe Interview Schedule). Utilizing this approach allowed for a more comprehensive view of how each woman uses her appearance to navigate the transition to motherhood.

As part of the interviews, demographic information was collected from each participant. As suggested by McCracken (1988), this information is useful in providing background information such as marital status, education, income, and other details

pertinent in providing a context for the participant's story (see Appendix A: Demographic Questions). Information obtained allowed me to become more familiar with the background and lifestyle of each participant, and, in turn, help to shape a deeper understanding of her experience as a new mother. Each interview was conducted at a location convenient to the participant and lasted between one and two hours.

Focus Groups

In addition to the interviews, two focus group sessions of five and four women (respectively) were conducted. Volunteers were recruited from the interview participant sample. According to Kitzinger (1995), focus groups are particularly useful for understanding group dynamics. As such, focus groups allow researchers access to the various forms of communication that people use in day-to-day interaction, such as jokes, anecdotes, and teasing. Such means of communication can provide insight into experiences that answers from direct interview questions cannot. Focus groups may also encourage contributions from those who feel as though they may have nothing to say to the researcher directly, but will engage in the discussion generated by other group members (Kitzinger, 1995).

Focus group questions focused on the overall experience of becoming a mother and how appearance plays a role in this experience. Examples of focus group questions include: *What are the best and worst parts of looking like a mother?* and *Has shopping for clothing, makeup, etc. changed now that you're a mother?* Based on a study by Kruske, Schmied, Sutton, and O'Hare (2004), mothers appear to enjoy sharing motherhood-related experiences as a group therefore the focus group method was

particularly appropriate for this dissertation. The relatively unstructured format of focus group discussion allows the researcher to discover unexpected insights which are relevant to the topic at hand but could not have been foreseen prior to the focus group discussion (Kahn, Anker, Patel, Barge, Sadhwani, & Kohle, 1991). Both focus groups were conducted at a location convenient to participants and lasted one hour and 30 minutes and two hours and 30 minutes, respectively. Focus group questions are included as Appendix B.

Participants

Understanding the experience of what it is like to be a new mother and the role of appearance in this experience is the primary goal of this research. In other words, in order to understand how a woman uses appearance to navigate the transition to becoming a new mother, we must start by understanding what the experience is like for her. Because the primary goal of the study is to capture the essence of the lived experiences of new mothers, the sample was limited to females. A total of 24 first-time, biological mothers were interviewed. All participants were over 18 years of age, with differing levels of income and education, and of varying ethnicities, although the majority of participants were Caucasian (see Table 1 for participant demographics). Obtaining a diversified sample in terms of demographics provided a wider range of experiences and, in turn, greater scope relative to the topic. The minimum age of 18 was chosen because only those women who are considered adults were recruited for this study. There was no maximum age for the study, as again, a somewhat diversified sample is sought. The age of the oldest participant was 37 years.

*Table 1**Participant Information*

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Pre-Baby Occupation	Post-Baby Occupation	Child's Age
Lily	29	Caucasian	Nurse	Stay-at-home-mom	4 months
Andrea	32	Caucasian	N/A	Stay-at-home-mom	6 weeks
Brianna	31	Caucasian	Human Resources	Human Resources	10 weeks
Jessica	27	Caucasian	Teacher	Stay-at-home-mom	5 months
Christina	31	Caucasian	Adjunct Instructor	Stay-at-home-mom	2 months
Heather	35	Caucasian	Professor	Professor	2 months
Deidre	36	Hispanic	Nurse	Nurse	6 months
Catherine	N/A	Caucasian	Therapist	Therapist	2 months
Bethany	27	Caucasian	Lab Technician	Stay-at-home-mom	2 months
Allison	27	Caucasian	Counselor	Counselor	6 months
Teresa	26	Pakistani	Human Resources	Human Resources	5 weeks
Carly	N/A	Caucasian	Teacher	Teacher	3 months
Layla	31	Caucasian	Teacher	Teacher	2 months
Aurora	31	Caucasian	Nurse	Stay-at-home-mom	2 months
Abby	31	Caucasian	Teacher	Stay-at-home-mom	5 months
Lane	27	Caucasian	Teacher	Teacher	6 weeks
Caitlin	37	Hispanic	Nurse	Nurse	5 months
Keri	N/A	Caucasian	Student	Student	4 months
Melinda	34	Caucasian	Teacher	Stay-at-home-mom	6 weeks

Table 1 Continued

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Pre-Baby Occupation	Post-Baby Occupation	Child's Age
Stella	32	Caucasian	Accountant	Stay-at-home-mom	6 months
Emma	31	Caucasian	Teacher	Teacher	6 months
Lynn	32	Caucasian	Teacher	Teacher	5 months
Becky	32	Caucasian	Professor	Professor	3 months
Holly	29	Hispanic	Professor	Professor	2 months

To recruit potential participants, I contacted personal acquaintances who were first time mothers and asked each of them to help recruit other first time mothers. I also contacted the leaders of new mother's organizations, such as Mommy and Me, and asked that a recruitment email written by me be passed along to the group for the purpose of obtaining participants. Those who wished to volunteer were asked to respond directly to me. Each woman had to agree to commit time to voluntarily participate in the study, and had to have a child no older than six months of age. Six months was identified as the maximum age because the first few months of becoming a mother are the most important for understanding how this transition period prompts identity construction (Guy & Banim, 2000; Stone, 1962; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). Interviews and focus groups were audio-taped with participants' permission (see Appendix C: Consent Form).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once data collection was completed, the interview and focus group data were transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes that shed light on the experiences of new

mothers and the role of appearance in these experiences. As Merriam (1998) suggests, transcriptions were verbatim, as this facilitated a more in-depth understanding of the data. A back and forth approach was then used to analyze the transcriptions and uncover meanings in the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Thematic analysis aided in interpreting and understanding the many ways that new mothers use appearance to shape their identities. As van Manen (1990) points out, “making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, and formulating a thematic understanding is an act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (p. 7). Each interview was analyzed individually and in relation to the whole of the data. The stages of the analysis process were structured as suggested by Spiggle (1994) and themes were derived from the interpretive process.

Spiggle (1994) developed a particular vocabulary surrounding the idea of qualitative data analysis, with the suggested steps being organizing data into categories and labels (categorization), grouping those categories into more generalized categories (abstraction), comparing the differences between the categories (comparison), identifying relationships between categories and theoretical frameworks (integration), while moving back and forth between these stages (iteration) by empirically analyzing the categories and conceptual framework (refutation). The outcome of this process is interpretation, in that the researcher then interprets the data, or draws out its meaning, and converts abstract concepts into more familiar terms (Spiggle, 1994). Essentially, the themes that emerged from this process were used to structure the interpretations of experiences explored in the interviews and focus groups (van Manen, 1990). The conceptual areas

that emerged from this dissertation were constructed as a series of concentric circles, with the mother in the center. The first “circle” considered the mother and her sense of self (i.e. Who am I?). This conceptual area is explained in Chapter IV. The second “circle” examined the relationship between the mother and her child, in terms of what the baby means for the new mother’s identity. This conceptual area is explained in Chapter V. The third and outermost “circle” explored the relationship between the mother, baby, and others, specifically regarding the role that others play in the new mother’s identity development. This conceptual area is explained in Chapter VI. In Chapter VII, emergent themes comprising Chapters IV-VI are tied back to pertinent literature on the topic, and considered through the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism. Chapter VIII presents implications of the findings.

Data from the interviews and focus groups were handled in a similar manner, although there were specific concerns with focus groups that had to be considered. Some of these concerns included the large amount of data gathered from a focus group session, as well as the kind of data they presented, such as group dynamics, non-verbal communication, and groupthink. Focus groups generate large amounts of data due to the number of people participating in a discussion at one time (Rabiee, 2004), therefore keeping the data organized and systematically transcribing and analyzing the data was important. Carey and Smith (1994) suggest immediate debriefing and recording notes upon completion of each focus group. Thus, I transcribed the focus group interviews immediately following the focus group session, as well as made notes at this time, in order to keep record of as much non-verbal communication as possible.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the methodological framework that was used to address the main questions of this study: *What is it like to become a new mother?* And *what is the role of appearance in this experience?* Phenomenology was described as a means to explore the lived experiences of new mothers. Methods used for data collection were explained, specifically in-depth interviews and focus groups. Participant selection and recruitment was also explained. Finally, the approach to data analysis and interpretation was discussed. In the next three chapters (Chapters IV-VI), I present the resulting thematic interpretation of data.

CHAPTER IV
THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART I:
NEW MOTHERHOOD AND THE SELF

Some may consider the transition to motherhood a gradual process; one that starts when a woman becomes pregnant and ends once her baby is born. However, after speaking at length with the participants in this study, it appears that becoming a new mother is experienced as more of a sudden transformation. A new mother finds her focus shifting from caring for herself, and perhaps a partner, to caring for a new baby. Her routine is completely transformed now that there is a baby in her life, and especially because that baby demands her attention at all times of the day and night.

In this chapter, I will explore the notion of the self and how the participants, as new mothers, feel about their identities now that they have become mothers. Based on the interpretation of the data, each participant in this study experienced the transition to motherhood in a unique way, whether that be due to her pregnancy experience, birth experience, or family and work life. Yet, while each mother tells her own story, some of these experiences are shared, and all are part of a larger whole, a whole that points to the common elements that are inherent in the transition to motherhood. In this chapter, I explore these elements through a thematic interpretation of the participants' experiences as individuals and as a group, examining the similarities and differences among them in order to create an overall understanding of this critical role transition.

Five themes emerged from the data that are used to describe participants' experiences with the transition to motherhood. These themes include: (1) *Congratulations, You're a Mom! Now What?* (2) *What Beauty Routine?* (3) *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, (4) *Nine-To-Five*, and (5) *Who Was I? Who Am I?* All of the themes in this chapter are inter-related to the extent that, combined, they speak to what the experience of becoming a mother means for the self. In particular, the concepts of appearance and consumption emerged as important issues within each theme, and as a result, are used to connect the themes together.

Congratulations, You're a Mom! Now What?

As pointed out above, due to the gestation period, it may seem as though the transition to motherhood is a slow and gradual process; however for the participants in this study, this was not the case. Often due to unexpected labor or birth complications, participants talked about how they were pregnant one minute and a mother the next. This abrupt role change frequently caused them to feel out of control and lost in the new role. Issues that emerged to define this theme include, *Upside Down: Lifestyle and Routine*, *Sudden Identity Transformation*, and *Blurred Time and Emotions*.

Upside Down: Lifestyle and Routine

According to participants, when a woman becomes a mother every aspect of her life changes. There is now a baby that she has to constantly care for, and do so while getting very little sleep. Her body is also going through several changes, including hormonal shifts, which adds to the feeling of being overwhelmed. Many participants, such as Brianna, described the transition to motherhood as an experience that literally

“turned my world upside down.” Likewise, Christina described the experience by asking “Can I use a series of emoticons? I feel that would better describe this experience than words.”

Changes are difficult to navigate for many people, even if their routines stay the same. But when facing the changes associated with becoming a mother, and losing half, if not more, of one’s normal sleep time, the challenge is that much harder. When asked what the best part of motherhood is, the almost universal response among participants was “being able to love someone so much.” When asked about the worst part of becoming a mother, the completely universal response was “lack of sleep.” Melinda discussed how one of the hardest things to get used to is that a mother never gets a break and that she is essentially at the whim of her baby.

Melinda: The worst part, I think, is that you’re ‘on’ all the time. You can’t really, like, that was the most overwhelming thing in the beginning. You can’t take off and you can’t sort of hand him over to somebody else. I’m nursing him so I can’t just give him to somebody and be like “I’m going to go sleep for six hours” because that’s not you know, maybe he’ll sleep for four hours, and that’s great, but I think that was one of the hardest things, especially in the beginning, like just not having control.

As Melinda highlights, a new mother is no longer in control of her own time. Even with something as basic as sleeping, a new mother no longer dictates when she will lie down to go to sleep or when she will set her alarm to wake. In this instance, the lack of power over her lifestyle and routine can cause a new mother to feel helpless, exhausted, and completely out of control. If a new mother is sleeping and waking at hours that she is not accustomed to, her world can seem as though it has been turned upside down.

Jessica too explained the upside-down nature of new motherhood that she experienced by saying, “I went from teaching in a classroom to being a mother overnight. Instead of going to work and dressing up, I was at home with a baby and wearing pjs all day. It wasn’t all bad, it was just really different.” In Jessica’s experience, she was used to working everyday and had a routine that consisted of dressing in “work” clothing. After having her baby, she was able and chose to wear pajamas, instead of dressing up in more formal clothing. In terms of clothing, her routine had been changed in that her style went from semi-formal to casual as a result of being a new mother who stays at home. This change in wardrobe is a direct result of the sudden transformation in her identity that she experienced upon becoming a mother.

Sudden Identity Transformation

Not only do new mothers experience a massive shift in their sleep patterns and dressing routines once having a baby, but they also experience major changes in identity. They are not only caring for themselves now. There is another person that they must care for, often at all hours of the day and night. Participants found this shift in focus from themselves to that of the baby difficult to adjust to. In one focus group, when asked about the worst parts of motherhood, Andrea replied, “The worst part would probably be the extreme need for selflessness.” Teresa and Brianna chimed in saying “I can’t just jump in the car and go somewhere anymore,” and “This person depends on me for everything!”

In terms of identity transformation, there is a shift from thinking solely about one’s own needs to thinking about another’s needs. When a new mother, who was once

accustomed to a way of life that involved satisfying her own desires whenever she felt like it, is faced with putting the needs of someone else first, it can come as quite a shock and be very difficult to adjust to. Participants in the study alluded to feeling as though they had no autonomy after having a baby; therefore, they often struggled with their own identities, as there was no longer time to focus on themselves.

Many participants revealed that they were in awe of being a mother after having the baby. They could not believe that they were mothers and had brought babies into the world. Several new mothers mentioned being incredibly frightened to leave the hospital with the baby because they were not sure that they were ready for such responsibility. Christina had a unique situation, in that her baby went directly from delivery via c-section to the Natal Intensive Care Unit at another hospital, miles from the hospital where Christina delivered her and was recovering from the surgery.

I: What kind of (if any) identity transformation did you feel immediately upon becoming a mother?

Christina: When I first saw her again in the hospital, I felt an immediate need to protect or nurture her. There was also a wave of enormous responsibility I now had. And overwhelming feelings of this responsibility. I think my experience was a little different though. I of course felt love, but our situation was so stressful that I immediately began worrying. I wasn't really afforded the opportunity to bask in the glow of new motherhood.

Lane, whose birthing and recovery experience varied greatly from Christina's in that she experienced no complications, also mentioned the difficulty of adjusting to the new role of mother.

Lane: Losing the...I guess the changes. Just losing, like it's not you anymore. You always have an attachment now and you're that person's, you know, lifeline and it's just hard to adjust to that. And your whole life just changes and flips upside down. Just adjusting to that was probably the worst part for me. Also you're not your normal self anymore, and handling the changes without sleep is even harder.

Lane speaks of loss, specifically the loss of a woman's unique identity when she becomes a mother. The notion of life not being about one person anymore, but about the new person in her life, is one of the difficulties that Lane explains. Although Christina had to endure a longer recovery time after having a c-section, as well as being separated from her daughter immediately after her birth, as new mothers, both she and Lane highlight the immense challenges that women face during this transitional time in their lives. The combination of a new person to care for, a routine that is completely changed, overwhelming feelings of responsibility, and functioning through these challenges with little to no sleep, points to a situation that could be difficult for anyone to navigate. Lily also touched on the subject of sleep deprivation and identity transformation.

Lily: The worst part is obviously the sleep deprivation, and um, you know, I think that I personally am trying to find my identity again because I'm very attached to her and there's not much time alone anymore so you know, my husband probably gets annoyed at that.

Lily mentioned the lack of alone time, and hints that it is not only hard to find her own identity because of this, but that due to a lack of alone time, the relationship with her husband may also be suffering. A new mother may therefore not only have trouble identifying who she is as a mother, but also who she is as a spouse or partner, now that she has a baby.

While most participants suggested that becoming mothers was a major upheaval in their lives, one participant felt more positive about the transition. Stella said “I felt everything came pretty naturally. I still feel myself, I would definitely consider myself changed. But in a better way, you know?” While Stella felt that she experienced a positive change in at least some parts of her identity, she nevertheless hinted at the sudden nature of the transformation to motherhood, saying “As soon as he was in my arms, I was his mother.” This statement points to the fact that, whether positive or negative, once a baby is born, a woman automatically and suddenly becomes a mother. However, while the act of becoming a mother may be immediately clear-cut, the passing of time and emotional turmoil is anything but precise.

Blurred Time and Emotions

Many participants talked about losing track of time, in terms of hours, day, weeks, etc. The sleep cycle of a baby can vary so much that often many felt as though they were up for 24 hours straight, for days on end. This change in sleep cycle obviously manifests itself in the way that new mothers handle their ever-evolving emotions. Christina describes the transition to motherhood as a “dizzying combination of ongoing emotions, from being elated, joyful, thankful, exhausted, stressed, and delirious, to hormonal, challenged, and pushed to the limit.” Due to the fast changing and quickly evolving nature of the emotions that new mothers experience, it can feel as though hours and days blend into one another, further creating a sense of loss of control of time. Before having a baby, an expectant mother may schedule her day in time increments in order to feel in control and productive, but as the participants in the study found, once a baby is on the

scene, that schedule, and thus how she feels as a mother, woman, and person in general, all are blurred together. As one of the participants explains, that loss of control over time and productivity greatly influences how a new mother feels about her own identity.

I: Do your actual identity as a mother and your ideal identity as a mother differ?

Christina: I get frustrated when I can't complete the simplest of tasks due to my new routine. I'd like to shower more often, and I'm tired of wearing maternity clothes because I can't fit into my old clothes yet (and if I could, I wouldn't want to get breast milk and spit-up all over them anyways). I have to feed her every two hours, so by the time I feed her and burp her and change her, it's time to do it all over again and the day is over before I know it.

Caitlin mirrored the same sentiments of frustration that stem from the hours and days getting away from her. As she explained, "I don't like how I hardly have any time to complete personal projects/hobbies or complete chores around the house."

The aggravation with not having time to complete household tasks accumulates when other roles need to be fulfilled as well. In a focus group interview, Emma describes this frustration.

Emma: I feel so blessed. Also tired and overwhelmed. Not about having a child, but handling it all. Working on a Masters' degree, building a house, working at a job, husband. I feel this overwhelming feeling but very happy at the same time.

Not only does Emma have to worry about taking care of her newborn, but she also has to do things around the house, work on her school work, go to her full-time job, spend time with her husband, and help her husband with the house they are building. That would be enough to make anyone stressed, frustrated, and tired, but when you add the enormous

responsibility of taking care of a newborn into the mix, it is no wonder that new mothers experience a warped sense of time and emotions.

Guilt is another emotion at least one participant experienced. Again, due to lack of sleep, and lack of the baby sleeping, Teresa talks about the frustration that she experiences with her baby, and how that frustration turns into guilt.

Teresa: It's a lot harder than I thought. I can tell you the worst part. I didn't realize I'd get frustrated with her. It's usually 2am and she shouldn't be awake. So the guilt. I feel terrible about that. The guilt and the frustration are probably the worst parts.

Teresa works full-time, so when we talked about these emotions, she was experiencing exhaustion from being up all night with her baby, then having to go to work the next day. Feeling frustrated with her baby for being up in the middle of the night is understandable, especially when she is only given a few hours for resting as it is. When she then starts to feel bad for being frustrated and that turns into guilt, she is left feeling emotionally exhausted on top of it all.

Participants' experiences point to the extent to which a new mother has a very hard time pinpointing how she feels about her identity during this time, as her emotions can range from happy and grateful to exhausted and aggravated in the blink of an eye. Moreover, because she is up at all hours of the day and night, it is hard to make or keep a schedule, making it seem as though time is constantly moving without any stops or starts. It is almost as if she is living inside of a slow moving tornado and has to ride it out until the baby is a few months old and starts to exist on some sort of normal schedule. As participants discussed, this loss of sense of time also coincides with the fact that new

mothers have no time to spend on their beauty routines, however minimal these routines may be.

What Beauty Routine?

When participants were asked about their beauty routines now that they are mothers, the most common response was laughter. They explained that this is because there is essentially no time for a beauty routine once a baby arrives. Participants who may have spent lots of time doing their hair or makeup before being a mother now consider themselves lucky if they are able to shower daily. Participants who did not spend much time on beauty routines still consider themselves lucky to maintain basic hygiene once becoming a mother. Most participants saw a clear difference between how they felt about their appearances while at home versus when going out in public.

At Home

For some participants, as new mothers, there is a bit of ambivalence in terms of how they look at home, while for others, maintaining their appearances at home is equally important to going out. Some also feel that even though they stay in the home for most of the newborn's first few weeks, it is still important for them to maintain some semblance of their former selves, even though no one sees them. For example, Jessica talked about how she purchased "professional loungewear" for after the baby was born. She said that she did not want to stay in old sweatpants and sweatshirts all day, so she bought new clothing, and even though it is still considered loungewear, she feels a little better wearing it than she would wearing old clothes. Keri however, suggested that she

felt more like herself when wearing clothing other than those worn for working out or loungewear.

I: How did you feel about how you looked when you went out?

Keri: It made me feel more normal to wear real clothes, not workout clothes. But the truth is, if you want to work out, you have to wear workout clothes all the time. I don't have time to change into those clothes and then out of them once I leave the gym. I used to wonder why stay-at-home-moms always wore workout stuff but now I know they have to. It doesn't make sense not to, if you plan on exercising.

Comfort is also an important motivating factor in why new mothers choose to wear loungewear or workout clothing. As Melinda suggests, this type of clothing just feels more comfortable than other clothes.

Melinda: I have these maternity yoga pants that are just like, it's like wearing pajamas, but they look sort of like pants. I'm in my own house, so I guess it doesn't matter what I wear as long as I'm comfortable.

In one focus group, Stella summed up how her beauty routine has changed since becoming a mother by saying, "I'd rather not run into any past boyfriends!" The other participants laughed in response.

Another topic that came up in conversation centered on the importance of clothing for mood. Heather pointed to the power of clothing to boost one's mood by saying "I will wear something nice to lift my mood a bit, to feel like I'm not just a sloppy mom covered in spit up." Yet some find this a difficult task to take on as new mothers. When asked about buying things for herself, Lily responded,

Lily: I want to look put together. It's just harder now. I kind of feel selfish for doing that for myself right now, so it really doesn't happen.

I: Did you find that it was easy for you to get caught in the gym shorts, sweat pants kind of mode?

L: Yeah, but then last night, I had been wearing gym clothes all day and my husband was like 'Do you want to go to the grocery store or do you want me to?' I think part of that is, when I do get in that mode, I don't want to go out in public as much. Like I'm not feeling super comfortable wearing, I mean if I look like I'm clean or whatever, maybe I could feel good in gym clothes out in public, but there are a lot of clothes I'm wearing right now that I'm like, I just don't want to run into anyone, I look like a slob, and so then I'm like isolating myself, which is not cool. Unacceptable and I don't want to be a recluse. I kind of have to make myself get dressed for the day, or I won't go out.

Lily does not prefer to wear gym clothes all of the time, but because she needs comfortable, flexible clothing she often resorts to wearing it. The problem that she experiences, however, is that if faced with the prospect or opportunity to go out, she does not want to, because she does not feel like she looks good enough for other people to see her. She feels sloppy and unkempt. On the flip-side however, she does not like staying at home all of the time, so in a way she is caught between a rock and a hard place.

Lily talked about specific parts of her beauty routine that lifted her spirits by commenting that "I remember that was a big deal, going and being able to get my hair highlighted. That does make me feel better." In Lily's case, her hair is not as naturally blond as she would like it to be, so she highlights her hair to make it the color she prefers. When pregnant, she was not able to do so, as doctors suggest refraining from highlighting due to the chemicals and fumes associated with this procedure. Once Lily was able to return her hair to its pre-baby color, she felt more like her old self, and thus happier in her new identity. Yet, Lily also mentioned feeling selfish for wanting to spend time on her looks

now that she has a child. This may be because she feels as though she needs to spend her time focusing solely on her child, or perhaps it is because she feels as though she should not care what people think of her. Either way, the fact that Lily feels selfish for partaking in a beauty routine, and feels too sloppy to go in public but is tired of staying at home, makes her a new mother who is full of contradictory and complicated feelings.

For some new mothers, it is easier to stay at home, wear comfortable clothing, and not worry about how they look versus going through the process of getting themselves ready and venturing out into the world for all to see. As revealed by the data however, there is, at the same time, an expressed need to go out, even when doing so may cause frustration and exhaustion. The main reason for this tension may be that a new mother desires to stay at home because it is a familiar place, and because she is scared and unsure about what will happen when she leaves the house with the baby. However, while many new mothers know that leaving the house may be more difficult due to getting themselves and the baby ready, they are at home so much of the time that there is a relatively strong urge to venture out to see other people and make sure that the world is still going on.

According to participants, the closet is also a point of contention for many new mothers. For some of the participants, the closet invokes feelings of frustration because pre-baby clothing no longer fits. For others, the closet is a reminder that they cannot afford new clothing due to budget restraints caused by the decision to stay at home with the child. Brianna, for example, was very matter-of-fact about her feelings regarding her closet and said “My closet is not a happy place.” She is unhappy about her postpartum

body size and frustrated that her pre-baby clothing did not yet fit. Likewise, when asked about her closet, Christina responded “I suppose I will have to have more will power (to not buy clothing) and just sit in my closet and cry...or just keep mixing up my necklaces and scarves. It’s very depressing.”

Part of the beauty routine that occurs for participants at home includes walking into their closets and choosing what they would like to wear. As mentioned above, for some participants this is an unpleasant task, as their clothing may not fit their post-baby bodies, or they may not be able to wear their pre-baby clothing due to issues such as breastfeeding or recovery from having a c-section. For other participants, such as Lane, this is not a major issue.

I: How do you feel about your closet right now?

Lane: It’s fine. I mean I can mostly wear what I was wearing before. I wore a lot of flowy, loose tops, so luckily it’s not too different than before I had her.

Whether their pre-baby clothing fits or is too small, a closet can bring up additional emotions for new mothers. Participants talked about garments that they wish they could wear and cannot, or that they may be able to fit into their clothing, but wish they had new clothing due to wanting new styles, now that they are mothers. Abby mentioned that she used to show more skin when dressing to go out, but now, since she is most often at home and has an active infant, she can no longer justify wearing that type of clothing.

Abby: I miss my clothes. It was fun to wear stuff that made me feel attractive. I liked getting attention and I felt good about myself. Now I kind of feel boring,

how I dress, but I'm at home and he grabs at everything, so I can't wear shirts that are low-cut. And I'm on the floor all of the time, and can't wear short skirts or dresses any more either.

As Abby explains, even if a new mother can wear her pre-baby clothing, it might not be realistic to do so, given the lifestyle that she now leads. As mentioned earlier, now that the participants are mothers, sometimes the identity of mother plays a role in what they feel comfortable wearing in public. For example, when talking about bathing suits, Andrea said that she would probably be wearing a tankini (one-piece) this year instead of a regular two piece. The reason is because, as she said, "I think it's more that I'm a mom instead of my age. I would just feel weird to be so uncovered now."

Going Out

When talking about going out in public and how they used to feel when they went out before having babies, most participants exuded excitement and confidence. For example, in talking about her pre-baby ensemble (see Figure 1), Carly explained,

I: How did you feel when wearing it? (In regard to pre-baby ensemble.)

Carly: I felt very comfortable and like myself.

Carly stated that she felt like herself when she would go out in her pre-baby ensemble. This suggests that she felt as though her outfit matched her identity. Contrasting this quote with the one by Abby below, it is interesting to see how much more unclear and undeveloped a new mother's identity is. For example, Abby describes her look as "at a crossroads" and mentions wanting to dress a certain way, but not feeling like she altogether achieves that standard.

I: Tell me how you feel about how you look. Is there a particular image you try to portray as a mother?

Abby: I constantly find myself at a crossroads. I just turned 31. I still feel like I am young and in good shape, so I want to dress trendy and in a figure-flattering way, like the way you see the beautiful celebrity mothers dress. Unfortunately, they have personal stylists, makeup artists, to put them together while I am a one-woman show. I do the best I can but find myself very bored with the basic way I dress...jean/shorts and a t-shirt and sandals. Practicality is key. If I am going somewhere that the other mommies dress a little nicer, I make sure to look extra put-together and that gives me confidence.



Figure 1. Carly's Pre-Baby Self Ensemble

Whereas many new mothers mentioned how their beauty routines have changed when going out or staying home, some new mothers have found no change in their beauty routines, or have experienced a change for the better. Diedre, for example, claims that she does not miss the beauty routine at all: "I have no time for it, so I don't worry about doing it. I wasn't very into appearances to begin with so it's nice to have an excuse now." However, while Deidre has embraced the relaxedness of her new beauty routine,

she did say that when she dresses up, she likes the compliments that she receives.

“Nobody knows what I look like with makeup on or my hair done, so the change always attracts attention and I kind of like that.” While Deidre states that she does not miss spending time on her beauty routine, she also mentions enjoying the attention she gets when she does dress up and goes out. This again shows the contradictory nature of a new mother’s thoughts and feelings, in that, though Deidre may prefer to stay home and not spend time on her looks, she enjoys the idea that other people see her as an attractive person when she goes out.

Ultimately, for some participants, a new mother’s natural or simple appearance at home may have as much meaning and impact on her identity as her more glamorous or made-up appearance in public. A new mother’s beauty routine, however, is not the only thing that impacts her identity as a mother. Participants talked about the fact that a new mother’s body size and shape can also have a major influence on how she sees herself in her new role.

The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Changes in Body Size and Shape

For some new mothers, changes in body size and shape are seen as simply inevitable and are dealt with through patience and understanding. For others, the bodily changes that occur once becoming a mother are staggering and leave them dissatisfied with their body images and unsure of how to manage their appearances. Several new mothers in this study mentioned actually embracing pregnancy because it was a time of relaxed body ideals. In contrast, postpartum changes in the body caused by breastfeeding were often mentioned as among the biggest challenges to deal with as a new mother.

Maintaining one's overall health is also an important topic among participants, as is trying to understand how and why the body changed as a result of motherhood and how to process all of this newness. Each of these issues is discussed in turn within this section.

Pregnancy was Great!

For many participants, gaining weight while pregnant was liberating. The reason for this is that during pregnancy, some participants felt that it was ok to not try to achieve or maintain a perfect body ideal. Indeed, it was almost as though they felt that they had permission to look bigger because they were pregnant. However, once the baby was born, cognitive dissonance emerged between the new mother's ideal body shape and reality. For example,

Christina: Ironically, I was happier with my body when I was pregnant.

I: Why was that?

Christina: I guess just because I didn't feel like, um, my body had to be, I had to be in good shape or something. It was kind of a great excuse to not worry about my weight. And when you start showing that you're pregnant, it's like there's a legitimate reason that you're getting bigger. Not just that I ate too many doughnuts!

Christina has struggled with her body size and shape since having her baby, but as she explained, her body size and shape was not as worrisome for her when she was pregnant. She felt that once it became obvious that she was pregnant, she did not have to give an excuse for feeling like she looked bigger. She felt as though her body was supposed to look bigger because she was pregnant, and that was a liberating feeling for her. Melinda

also enjoyed how she looked while pregnant, although for different reasons than

Christina,

I: So how are you feeling about how you look right now?

Melinda: Um, actually not as good as when I was pregnant, in some ways. Because when I was pregnant I had all these clothes that people had sent me, all these um Indian tops and they had just gotten them in large because they're kind of cut loose anyhow and so until the last month or so I could use those, so I had this like 40 different embroidered things in all these different delicate fabrics and flowers and I'd just wear them with black maternity pants and some jewelry or something and so I felt like I looked put together all the time and then um, the last month I was just wearing big knit shirts but you know at that point people are still nice to you and they're busy telling you you look gorgeous. But now I've been wearing like the same five t-shirts and um I'm waiting for him to be old enough to be able to go shopping and for me to stabilize a little at a size.

Melinda enjoyed the clothing aspect of being pregnant, in that she appreciated the style of maternity wear. She was comfortable in the clothing and felt put together because of the way that she was able to dress while pregnant. Melinda also enjoyed the attention that she would get when pregnant because people are typically very encouraging and open to telling pregnant women that they look beautiful. Pregnancy, it seems, is a widely appreciated appearance in society, in terms of aesthetics. In addition, it also seems that those participants who were more appreciative of their pregnant bodies had a slightly easier time accepting their postpartum ones.

In contrast, participants who relaxed their body ideals during pregnancy and took longer to lose their baby weight seemed to have a slightly harder time accepting bodily changes in the postpartum period. However, the new mothers who watched their weight and size during pregnancy, and quickly lost the weight gained during pregnancy seemed

to adjust to their new bodies more easily. Interestingly, the fact that the baby weight and stomach size did not dissipate quickly was shocking for most participants.

Lane: I thought I would be back to my normal size after having her. But I was still in maternity pants for like a month! I looked like I was five months pregnant for a while after having her. Nobody tells you that part.

Another body change that was difficult for the majority of participants to become used to was an increase in breast size, typically associated with breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding Woes

The most commonly mentioned body change by the new mothers in the study was breast size, and the fact that their breast sizes increased since having a baby, especially for those who were breastfeeding. Topics like unattractive nursing bras and shirts, difficulty breastfeeding in public, and the time restraints involved in breastfeeding were all mentioned by the majority of participants. In a discussion with Lily, she pointed to the challenges associated with nursing bras in particular.

I: With the breastfeeding, the shirts are of course a big deal, but have you worn the nursing bras too?

Lily: Uh yeah, all I have right now and they are so unattractive and um, I guess I went to the store the other day and I think it's easier when it's small, medium and large, just because obviously your cup size is going to change throughout the day and I don't know how to buy. A lot of them are cup sizes, like your normal bra, so I like sat there and I was like, "I have no idea what I am," and I guess I could have asked, but I was sort of with her and was in a hurry and was like "Screw it." So I wear the same three bras over and over again and they're hideous, they don't look cute under clothes, so that's another thing I have to figure out, what's going to wear smoothly, and I have the nursing pads, and if you wear something tight you can see them, so that, come to think of it, it's been miserable, I don't enjoy that whole part of it.

Alongside bras, outer clothing that is functional while breastfeeding is also a problem. Andrea mentioned the trouble with finding clothing to wear while breastfeeding, saying “When I started looking at everything with nursing, I’m like ‘Can’t wear that, can’t wear that, definitely can’t wear that, that’s not easy to nurse in.’” She did, however, find a bit of a solution to some of her breastfeeding problems in the form of a nursing cover.

Andrea: Just a couple of days ago at Mommy and Me Yoga, one of the girls had a nursing cover that was just amazing. I was like “Wow! I’ve never seen that or heard of that.” I mean I’ve heard of them before but my biggest hang up was like how can you even see when latching on and holding a blanket and doing all this stuff. So that has made my wardrobe completely different now that I have this nursing cover that makes it not so difficult to nurse.

I: Did you buy one?

Andrea: I did. I went out and bought one right after that on Monday. So that’s changed what I have to worry about wearing. Because you can practically strip down naked in the thing and still be covered, so I’m less stressed about how easy it is to nurse.

Many participants mentioned being dissatisfied about chest size once they started breastfeeding, in the sense that it had substantially increased. Keri remarked that “It’s like that’s all there is to me now. They’re everywhere!” Although many of the participants mentioned being dissatisfied with their chest sizes once they started breastfeeding, Diedre felt the opposite. “I like being bigger. I just don’t like the kind of bra I have to wear for breastfeeding. If I’m going to finally be bigger I want to show them off in a pretty bra at least.”

Healthy Moms

While some of the participants were frustrated and disappointed about their body sizes and shapes, overall, most seemed focused on maintaining their general health. For most participants, the concern is not about physical fitness or dieting as much as it is about eating healthy and getting moderate exercise so that they feel good while playing with their babies.

I: Do you have an ideal goal to reach, weight wise?

Carly: Right now I am trying to give myself more time to lose the baby weight. I have lost some, but would like to lose a little more to feel healthier. As a mother, my ultimate goal is to be healthy and have energy to be as hands-on as possible. I am fairly comfortable with my body, but I know I can improve. I have not been making enough time for exercise, which would greatly improve my feelings about my body.

Deidre, who is a nurse, talked about the opposite side of this notion and said “It’s hard to be healthy because you don’t have the time. I’m a nurse and I know I should be healthy, but it’s hard.”

Maintaining and portraying a health body image is very important for many participants, particularly those with daughters. That is, these participants stress the importance of being a good role model for their daughters, in terms of being healthy and having positive body images. For example, when discussing her desire to lose weight Christina said, “I want to be healthy for my daughter and serve as a positive role model for her regarding body image. That serves as strong motivation to improve my health and body image moving forward.” In a similar vein, these participants also talked about the need to be dressed appropriately. Jessica also has a daughter and said “When I became a

teacher, my wardrobe became more modest. You realize you're a role model, for kids, your daughter, so it's definitely changed in that aspect." Likewise, Lily mentioned that she wants her daughter to be proud of her in terms of how she looks and dresses, saying "I don't want her to be embarrassed by me, by something I wear or how I look. At least not until she's older."

While some participants are not happy with their postpartum bodies, many acknowledged that they are more concerned with maintaining a healthy lifestyle instead of focusing solely on losing weight and looking a certain way. The participants who felt that they need to be a role model for their daughters used this feeling as another incentive in the goal to achieve that healthy lifestyle. Whether prompted by losing weight, fitting back into pre-baby clothing, or providing a positive image for their children, participants agreed that maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important, yet still recognize that accepting the changes in their bodies in the postpartum period is a difficult process.

Seriously, Whose Body is This?

While new mothers were aware that their bodies were going to go through obvious changes after pregnancy, for some participants, these changes still came as a shock. Many participants discussed being thankful for the trend in flowy tops, so that they could wear clothing that camouflaged their often larger postpartum stomachs. Others discussed feeling sad about the fact that they cannot wear pre-baby clothing yet and that their clothing fits in different ways than before having a baby. In one focus group, Teresa and Heather talked about how they handle the changes in their bodies that have occurred.

I: How do you compensate for your body not being back to “normal?”

Teresa: I try to dress up more and wear jewelry and makeup. I think if I make myself look as good as I can in other areas, people might not notice that my body doesn't look the same.

Heather: I'm generally pretty happy with my appearance, but my hips feel so much wider than the rest of my body. I'm ready for them to shrink back!

Teresa uses jewelry and makeup to take the focus off of her body since having her baby, and Heather, while generally pleased with her appearance, still feels as though her body is not the same as it was before having her baby. When talking with Melinda about dress shopping for an upcoming wedding, she talked about how a dress she was hoping to wear did not fit.

Melinda: Yeah, that was upsetting. It was a dress I felt really cute in you know, but then I was like “oh”, part of it is I haven't lost all the weight yet so that's, but uh, you know, I was like blah, but the new dress is good and I'm hoping tomorrow to find something. It's a little kind of scary 'cause it's a tiny town so there's not many choices.

On the same topic, Andrea responded to the question of fit of pre-baby clothing by saying “I'm the same weight that I was before having him but for some reason the clothes don't fit me the same way. I can't even wear some of them and at one point I weighed less than before getting pregnant.” Not only does a new mother have to deal with a body that may be a bigger size or different shape than before being pregnant, but she also has to deal with the effects of this body shape for clothing fit. Often participants mentioned that when they try to get back into their pre-baby clothing, it does not fit as it did before having the baby. This problem confused and frustrated many participants

because they desire to wear clothing that they feel expresses who they are, but the clothing does not allow for the changes in their bodies. Again, the participants experienced a gap between who they think they are and who they are able to dress to be. This gap was particularly true for those who went back to work right after having the baby.

Nine-To-Five

In talking with participants, appearances seem to be most important to those who planned to go back to work after the maternity leave. At the very least, they experienced less ambivalence when it came to their appearances. In contrast, several new mothers who are staying at home full-time commented on enjoying the flexibility of their clothing choices and being able to wear loungewear all of the time. Stella said, “It’s kind of nice getting up and not having to pick out something different to wear everyday. But I do get tired of wearing the same old thing around the house all the time too.” Participants who returned to work after the baby, were very concerned about returning to their pre-pregnancy weight and size, and appearing as professionals. One participant, Teresa, said that she feels pressure at work to look like she never had a baby. Appearances are very important at her workplace, and she feels as though she may earn more respect at work if she looks like her pre-baby self. As Teresa says “At my job, your appearance is as important as your ability to do work. I’m not saying it should be that way. It just is.” In Teresa’s experience, her professional identity is directly tied to how she looks while at work.

Heather, who is a professor, responded with the following when asked about how she dresses for work:

Heather: Professionally, I try to make sure people know that I can successfully balance work and family life, that having kids doesn't diminish my abilities as a professional. To my kids, I want them to see me as happy, competent, and committed to everything I do too.

I: How do you dress for work?

Heather: I like to dress nicer now when going to work. It helps me feel more human, like I'm something other than just a mom. It's like I'm doing something for me.

I: How did you feel when you wore your pre-baby clothing?

Heather: I actually wore this dress just the other day for a meeting. I didn't feel as composed and confident in it because it didn't fit as well. I wore a black sweater over it to hide my arm and tummy chub.

Heather enjoys working because it provides her with an identity in addition to being a mother. Moreover, she works because she enjoys doing so. She also wants her children to see her as a committed professional. How she feels about her postpartum appearance in this role, however, does not match with how she would like to see herself and how she hopes her children will see her, which is as a confident and composed professional woman. Figure 2 is an example of a dress from Heather's pre-baby wardrobe that she felt confident wearing before having the baby. However, when wearing the dress as a postpartum mother, she does not feel as comfortable and confident due to body changes in size and shape.



Figure 2. Heather's Pre-Baby Self Ensemble.

Among the participants, the new mothers who went back to work relatively quickly after having their babies appeared to transition to their roles as mothers a bit more quickly than the new mothers who stayed home. This may be out of the necessity to figure out routines and schedules faster due to going back to work, or perhaps because their jobs or careers quickly provided them with an identity that was more similar to their pre-baby identities than those mothers who stayed at home. For example, just a couple of months postpartum, Deidre, Brianna, and Caitlin have to figure out how to dress as both mothers and professionals. Deidre works as a nurse and therefore is able to wear scrubs to work. She talked about how her work experience, in terms of being a new mother, is more about the time spent away from her baby, and not as much about dressing for work. She explained, “I wear scrubs to work, so it’s comfortable and I don’t have to think about what I’m going to wear. The hard part is just missing her.” Both Brianna and Caitlin are able to wear fairly casual clothing at their jobs, but as Brianna suggests, she may have some trouble finding clothing for work that fits.

Brianna: I'm just worried that my clothes won't fit, you know? I've got everything, but so far, nothing's fitting and I don't have too much longer before I have to go back. I'm probably going to have to buy some pants, but I hope that's all. I really want to lose the weight quickly so that I can just wear my old clothes. I don't have money to spend on new stuff!

In Brianna's experience, she is faced with returning to work soon and still has not lost enough weight to fit back into her pre-baby clothing. Money is an important issue for her, as she does not want to spend a lot on new clothing when she already has a closet full of clothing to wear to work.

Caitlin describes the difference between how she feels at home versus how she wants people to see her at work by saying "I feel less attractive at home because comfort and function always trump attractiveness there." When later asked about her ideal-self ensemble (Figure 3), she said "My goal is to feel ultra feminine. I want my look (at work) to reflect the kind of person I strive to be, comfortable but approachable and feminine, even though I'm a mom." Caitlin has a very specific idea of how she wants her work colleagues to view her, and suggests that her ideal appearance reflects an identity which includes facets outside of the realm of motherhood.



Figure 3. Caitlin's Ideal Self Ensemble, found on Pinterest

Experiencing a major upheaval in identity, massive changes in beauty routines, staggering body transformations, and often a switch in professional roles can undoubtedly lead a new mother to question who she was before having a baby and who she is now that she is a mother. Indeed, this is clearly the case for many of the participants in this study.

Who Was I? Who Am I?

As the data indicate, a new mother is experiencing a tumultuous range of emotions and feelings concerning her identity immediately upon the arrival of her child. Often this can prompt her to think about questions such as *Who was I?* or *Who am I?* Whether the new mother reflects specifically on questions such as these, or in a roundabout way thinks about how she has changed now that she is a mother, one thing is for certain: A new mother has lost a large part of her old self and has gained several facets of a new self.

Loss of Old Self

According to most participants in the study, one of the major challenges after having the child is a feeling of intense loss over the pre-baby self. Whether due to the new, constant focus on the baby, the emotional upheaval caused by changing hormones and lack of sleep, or changes in how the new mother looks, most feel as though a part of the self has been lost or left behind once the baby was born. This feeling of losing the old self presented itself in various ways for the new mothers. For example, when asked about the best and worst parts of becoming a mother, Heather spoke specifically about missing her work routine as a professor. She explained that “The best part is taking the time to go slowly and appreciate having a newborn. The worst part, aside from the sleeplessness, is that I miss my professional life quite a bit. It’s a big part of who I am.” For Heather, gaining a baby was a wonderful addition to her life, but her work role had been an important part of her identity before having her baby. Because she was at home taking care of her newborn, she felt detached from one of the roles that made up a significant part of herself, and therefore felt incomplete.

Feelings of loss of one’s self or identity also presented itself in terms of clothing. For instance, when participants were asked about their thoughts on clothing in their closets that they can no longer wear, Stella explained her feelings about her wardrobe.

Stella: I wonder what I was thinking when I bought half my clothes. It’s like “Who the heck was this person?!” I mean I wish I could fit in them, but I don’t miss them. I am definitely a more careful purchaser now.

In contrast, when talking about pre-baby clothing, Abby said “I loved the attention that I would get when we went out. Made me feel like I still had it even after being married.” Whereas Stella feels like her pre-baby styles perhaps do not mesh with her pre- and post-baby self, Abby enjoyed her pre-baby clothing because it made her feel confident and attractive. She liked the fact that even though she was married, she could still garner attention. Both participants desire to fit into their pre-baby clothing again, however, only Abby expressed positive feelings toward the old styles.

Brianna described very negative feelings about her current wardrobe, particularly when discussing how she feels about purchasing clothing for her versus her baby.

Brianna: My closet is not a happy place. I enjoy buying clothes for her, but I can't fit into anything I have and I'm not going to go out and buy all new sizes for me. I don't want to wear a bigger size and I don't want to spend the money.

Brianna gained weight during her pregnancy and has had trouble losing as much as she would like. She is returning to work soon as a Human Resources Specialist and has to wear casual, yet professional, clothing. She is afraid that she will not be able to fit into anything she has. Her feelings about buying new clothes are understandable, in that she does not want to purchase clothing in a size that is larger than what she wishes she can fit into, and she does not want to spend money on clothing that she sees as being “only temporary.”

In a focus group interview, Christina, Emma, and Stella all discussed how important comfort is, in terms of clothing, once a woman becomes a new mother.

Emma: Clothes have to be comfortable. Professional, dressy, pajamas, workout clothes, doesn't matter, as long as it's pretty comfortable.

Stella: I like to wear comfortable clothes as well, and things he can't mess up or that he can nurse in.

Christina: I third the comfort criteria. When you're running around so much, cleaning, picking up after a baby, I can't imagine being in uncomfortable clothing at the same time.

Christina further discussed the clothing that she likes to wear now and how she has altered her wardrobe for new motherhood.

Christina: Well I'm not ashamed to say that I'm still enjoying my maternity jeans. They're just so comfortable! I eventually will get back into zippers. I did finally buy myself some new tops a few weeks ago, mostly because I still can't fit, or at least look good, in my old stuff, so I broke down and bought some things. I typically wear casual clothes, even at work. I usually can be found in jeans and a tank top with a cardigan and I dress it up with jewelry and a scarf. I have a *lot* of scarves, even before pregnancy. It's a good thing they're in style now!

Another interesting finding about clothing and sense of lost self is that age, or stage in life, may have something to do with whether a new mother misses her old clothing. When asked if she misses her old clothing, Jessica, who is 27, responded by saying, "Not really. I had to start dressing more modestly when I became a teacher, so I don't really dress any different than before I had her." Perhaps she would have missed her old clothing more if she felt that she needs to dress differently as a mother than she did before having her baby. However, because Jessica is at a stage in life where she already has a professional career, she is used to dressing more modestly, which is also how she feels a mother should dress.

Interestingly, one of the most telling ways that the participants described the loss of self was by expressing the desire to return to their old or “normal” selves. Andrea explained this notion best by saying “My ideal self is where I used to be.” In further discussion with Andrea, she also mentioned that during pregnancy she stopped wearing high heels because she was working and it was too tiring to do so, and she has not worn a pair since becoming a mother. She explained “I guess that is something I didn’t think about that’s different now than before. I used to wear heels all the time but now I never do.” She reflected on this and seemed surprised that she did not miss this part of her past identity.

Whereas Andrea has changed her wardrobe in some ways since becoming a mother, Deidre experienced a change in hobbies and interests. Before having her baby she was an avid runner. Throughout the interview she referred back to that time and her running interest. She frequently mentioned being able to run 10 miles per day and suggested that she would feel more like herself if she could get back to running that much.

Deidre: For me it’s hard to get back into running when I’ve been out of it for so long. My goal is to get back into running and to do another half marathon. For me, it wasn’t only to look good, but also it was very, I guess it was almost like a medicine because it helped to clear your mind, reduce stress, and things like that. Behind our house is a track, and if I can run half of that, I’ll be happy. I used to run like seven miles a day, then I’d have my long runs and I’d run like eight to ten miles. And now I can’t run at all.

I: I’d love to run, but it’s just hard to get started.

D: It’s the hardest thing to get back into.

For some participants, not only does loss of self occur in terms of clothing and one's work role, but also in terms of interests and hobbies. Deidre misses her old self in terms of the fact that she was an avid athlete, and now does not have time to run at all because she has a newborn. Even though a new version of her self is being created, she still mourns the loss of parts of the old one.

Creation of a New Self

At the same time that there is a loss of self for some, a new self is forming. To that end, feeling like the pre-baby self was lost upon becoming a mother turned into feeling that the creation of a new self is occurring. While participants may miss their old clothes, job, friends, and freedom, they also are in the process of trying to figure out who they are as mothers. All of this is in addition to being a spouse, professional, friend etc. This discovery process may yield exciting results for some new mothers, but as participants in this study suggest, it is difficult for many to even begin to understand the new role. The general consensus among participants was that they struggle with this new self primarily because they do not yet know how to fit into the new role of "mother." For instance, Holly posted on Facebook about her struggle with sharing too much information about her baby.

Holly: I promised myself when I was pregnant that I would not be "that person" who does nothing but post baby related things to Facebook. "I'll retain my own life!," I thought. "Surely I will be capable of having interesting and meaningful moments that do not revolve around a baby!," I boasted. Ha! Sweet, naïve, pregnant-Holly.

Holly, who is an assistant professor, felt as though she would retain her pre-baby identity once she became a mother. However, she has seen that it is difficult to discuss issues other than the baby, being that her life consists primarily of taking care of her baby at the current time. This new role makes up a large part of her identity right now, and therefore she finds that it also makes up a large part of the things that she is interested in.

Because being a mother is new to them, and unfamiliar, participants commonly referred to the “old” self or “normal” self and answered questions as though they were still this person or would be returning to this person very soon. This notion was quite apparent when I observed their pre-baby versus ideal clothing ensembles. Interestingly, the ensembles were almost always identical, sometimes with the ideal ensemble only differing in quality of fabric. It is almost as though participants cannot fathom what their identities as mothers look like, so they automatically default to their pre-baby preferences. In line with this, Keri made an interesting point about motherhood that suggests the need for something more, stating “New mothers want an identity in addition to being a mother.”

Several participants, such as Lily, mentioned the desire to look more put together as a new mother, saying “I strive for, you know, looking human again.” Participants mentioned spending a lot of time in pajamas, sweat pants and shirts, and old clothes. Jessica, however, said that she decided to invest in “professional loungewear” once her baby was born.

Jessica: Well, I knew Eliza was going to be in the NICU for a while, so I decided to go out and buy some new clothes to wear while she was there. It was still

mostly yoga pants and loose tops, but at least they were new. It's the only time I've said "I need this" about clothes.

Participants also talked about the notion that mothers dress a "certain way." For example, when asked if she would wear a two piece bathing suit, Jessica stated "Maybe, but I guess 'cause I'm a mom now I'd rather be more modest." Andrea echoed this sentiment when discussing the dresses and tops that she used to wear, by saying "Those I probably won't wear again because they're too low cut and, I don't know, not appropriate for a mom I guess." Whereas the participants would have worn certain garments that may have showed more skin before having a baby, they now feel that because they are moms they need to cover up more. This change in thought about the appropriateness of clothing is part of the new identity that they are forming as mothers.

Based on the interpretation of data presented here, participants are propelled into the world of motherhood rather quickly, even though they usually have nine months to mentally prepare for this new role. Being transformed into a new mother can be an overwhelming experience, causing an intense loss of identity and sense of self. Beauty routines, in private and in public, are altered during this transition, as is one's body and body image. Breastfeeding challenges, maintaining one's health, and coming to grips with a new body shape and size are also issues that the new mother faces in the postpartum period. Finally, whether or not the new mother returns to work plays an important role in how she views her identity and how she feels about her appearance as part of that. All of these concerns conspire to cause a simultaneous loss of old self as well as creation of new self for new mothers. Indeed, based on the interpretation of data,

there may be no other life transition that affects a woman's identity as fiercely and as quickly as becoming a mother.

Summary

In this chapter, I examined how participants feel about their identities as new mothers in terms of the self. The ways in which participants' lives were turned upside down once becoming mothers was explored, as were changes in beauty routines and body shapes and sizes. Participant's feelings concerning returning to work or staying at home full-time were also examined relative to appearance and identity. All of the issues that were brought to light in this chapter help to explain how the notion of self and identity are impacted upon becoming a mother. In the next chapter, the relationship between a new mother and her baby, and the role of appearance and consumption within it, will be discussed.

CHAPTER V

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART II: JUST THE TWO OF US

As discussed in the previous chapter, according to participants, having a baby creates dramatic changes in a woman's life, including changes in her identity and sense of self. While the changes that a new mother experiences are largely social and psychological, she also experiences changes in her lifestyle, as there is now another person in her life for whom she is completely responsible. Newborn babies and infants need constant care, most of which is typically given by the mother. It is no wonder, then, that some of the main topics of discussion among participants as new mothers had to do with the difficulties of adjusting to having no "alone time," and completing seemingly simple tasks around the home, alongside feeling like they are always "on call" when it comes to the baby.

Along with physical aspects of wearing, holding, and feeding a new baby, there are also other considerations, such as the challenging logistics of leaving the house with a new baby and what a new mother's appearance looks like when a baby is in tow. What was once a simple task for the participants, leaving the house to go shopping now entails packing baby gear and scheduling nap and feeding times around the shopping trip. Some participants choose to plan their outings down to the minute, while others take a more flexible approach. As new mothers, however, all participants spoke of the immense difficulties of adjusting to life with a baby.

In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between the new mother and her baby relative to such lifestyle challenges and adjustments. Three themes emerged from the data which are used to describe the participants' experiences with their transitions to motherhood in this capacity: (1) *Baby Demands*, (2) *Dressing Like a Mom*, and (3) *Shifting Focus*. All of the themes are inter-related and are dependent on each other to create a holistic understanding of the experience of becoming a mother from the perspective of how the relationship between mother and baby shapes the new mother's identity. In particular, the concepts of appearance and consumption are explored within each theme and act as a primary link between them.

Baby Demands

Participants mentioned many changes that occurred once they became mothers, especially in terms of how they viewed and felt about themselves; however, other changes are specifically related to the relationship between mother and baby. For example, between the amount of time that it takes to care for a newborn and the lack of energy as a result of caring for the baby (and being up at all hours of the night), participants find it very difficult to be productive during the day. Even accomplishing the smallest of tasks, such as folding a load of laundry or answering emails, can take hours because of the immediate nurturing that is required so often when a baby is around. Participants find that while they spend most of the day tending to the needs of their babies, and the remainder of the day trying to accomplish any task possible, there is little time left to devote to themselves. The relationship between a new mother and her baby is

a unique one, and one, as participants explained, that often results in unanticipated challenges.

Limited Productivity

A common topic of discussion among participants was that of limited productivity and the frustrations that go along with it. Many new mothers feel that several aspects of their lives get put on hold when the new baby arrives. Simple tasks, such as doing laundry, washing dishes, and taking a shower often prompt immense aggravation and disappointment, either because the new mother does not have time to get to those tasks or because when she does have free time, she would rather not spend it on household chores. Christina explains how hard it is to make time to do tasks around the house.

Christina: By the time she goes to bed at night I'm so tired, but it's the only time I have to do things by myself so I end up staying up until way after midnight.

I: What do you end up doing at night?

Christina: I'd like to say I use the time to catch up on cleaning and laundry and stuff like that, but usually I sit on the couch and watch Netflix because I don't have energy for anything else.

Similarly, Layla discussed her frustration about having to complete household tasks and not having energy to do them or simply wanting to spend time just relaxing.

Layla: By the time I sit down it's 8, 9 o'clock and I'm like "Oh my gosh, I gotta go to bed cause we're gonna be getting up soon." Well, there's another day of not getting anything around here done! I just feel like I can't win. When I finally have a minute to myself to get things done, all I want to do is lay on the couch and read or watch TV.

As Layla suggests, time seems to speed by for new mothers, in that a day is over before she knows it and she often feels as though her goals are not being achieved. Feeling too tired to do anything productive is frustrating and disappointing. While participants love their children, they also feel constantly overwhelmed and behind in every aspect of life due to having this new person with them all day long, and having to take care of his or her every need at any given moment. For a participant who used to link being productive to her identity, the frustration of being unproductive can create a sense of loss regarding that part of the self.

Newborn sleep schedules can be erratic. Some infants sleep in three to four hour stretches, while others wake up every two hours. A new mother cannot prepare for the shock to her own sleep schedule once having a baby. Often a new mother is up all day with the baby, and the majority of the night, depending on whether she has help with the baby and how well her baby sleeps. Lack of sleep can cause a new mother to feel constantly exhausted, which makes it hard to be productive. As Abby suggests, when a new mother is the primary care-taker of the child, fatigue makes it difficult to get things done.

Abby: I am a stay-at-home mom who cares for my son 24/7. My husband is gone from seven until five thirty Monday through Friday. Jax is typically awake from six in the morning until seven at night, and it's very busy. By the end of the day I'm too exhausted to do anything that is on my "to do" list or for myself. We don't have anyone to babysit him and I'm rarely away from him.

When a new mother is the person taking care of the baby most of the time, it can be frustrating to feel like she does not have control over her time or her to-do list. When

asked about the worst part of becoming a mother, Caitlin said “I hate that I get no sleep and how I hardly have any time to complete my personal projects or do chores around the house.” Participants talked about how chores get put on the backburner when a baby is around, as does personal time. But, for participants, it is not just the erratic schedule of a baby that causes such disruption in one’s life, it is also the physical demands of motherhood.

There is Always Someone with Me...And on Me

Newborns typically eat every two to three hours, at least during the first few months of life. The usual advice that a doctor gives a new mother is to feed the baby three hours after the start of the previous feeding. As an example, if a new mother feeds the baby at 1:00 pm, she then needs to feed the baby again at 4:00 pm. It may take the infant 30 minutes to eat, then another 15 minutes to burp. It is also common for infants to have a bowel movement immediately following eating, so a diaper change has to be factored in, if not a complete outfit change. Therefore, if a new mother is really lucky, she may get two hours of baby-free time (at most) between feedings, and that is only if her baby is either sleeping or unusually content. Often new mothers are told to sleep while the baby is sleeping. But as Becky explains, that suggestion is frustrating in and of itself.

I: What do you do while the baby is sleeping?

Becky: When he does decide to sleep, I usually try to do stuff around the house. I would like to sleep but that just seems like a waste of time. I mean I know I need the sleep, but if I sleep every time he does, then nothing would ever get done around here. When would I do the laundry or fix food or take a shower?

For some participants, when the baby is awake it demands full attention. For example, Lane explains that her baby is usually only content when she is holding her or carrying her in a baby carrier.

Lane: I can't even get stuff done while she's sleeping because she's usually on me. I mean literally on me. I have to either hold her while she sleeps or carry her in the Baby Bjorn or else she will scream bloody murder. I can do stuff like straighten up, but I haven't gotten comfortable enough to wash the dishes or fold clothes yet cause I'm scared I'll drop her out or hit her head or something. I don't know, it's like I want to be productive and do stuff, but I also don't want to hear her cry.

Lane's explanation probably illustrates a new mother's conundrum best, in that while she may want to do certain things that fit with how she views herself (e.g. being productive), she ultimately will do whatever keeps the baby happy and content for the time being. In many ways, in order to achieve these moments of contentedness, participants must lower their expectations regarding the ability to complete non baby-related tasks.

Over and over again, participants mentioned going from being someone who takes time to create a nice appearance to someone whose daily goal is simply showering. This is another example of how a baby's demands force a new mother to lower her expectations regarding what she can accomplish. Other examples include cooking, working, and as discussed, household chores. For example, Christina described how she had to become more flexible when it comes to the cleanliness of her house.

Christina: I used to make sure that everything was wiped clean, cat hair was swept, clothes were at least put away, but now I just try to make sure that food isn't left out. Between glasses of water laying around, pumping supplies all over the place, and bottles, there's just no way I can keep this place as clean as I want to. I guess I've kind of given up trying.

Becky, a faculty member, discussed how her professional life must now accommodate the baby.

Becky: So the next super professional thing I get to do since having a baby is to take him with me to a dissertation proposal defense tomorrow. I just hope he holds the spit-up and explosive pooping until we're done.

In a similar vein, Lily explained how her expectations for going out in public have changed since having a baby.

I: How do you feel when she decides it's time to go or starts having a fit in a store?

Lily: Um, we were in a dressing room and it was pretty empty in the store so it wasn't a huge deal, but I like start kind of panicking. I just don't want to be that person that has a kid flipping out. But now that I'm a mom I also feel bad for the parents now. I think I used to think "Why won't they control their kid?", but now I know they really can't control them, but they can take them out. Um so, I try not to sweat it too much but I also try to kind of scoot as quickly as possible.

As Lily's example suggests, expectations must change when becoming a mother. Tasks and chores that once seemed easy or menial can suddenly be incredibly challenging. Things like straightening the house, running to the store, doing laundry, even showering can take days to accomplish, or may not get done at all. According to participants, the deciding factor as to whether those activities get accomplished is a baby's temperament and schedule. That is, nothing is entirely up to the woman anymore because now there is always the baby to think about. This change in the participant's way of life can also play out in public, such as when she takes her baby shopping.

Shopping Constraints

While attempting to be productive at home can be a major challenge for new mothers, leaving the house to go out with a baby requires patience and planning unlike anything participants had experienced before. Keri sums up the challenge by saying,

Keri: You have to time feedings just right, pack all of their necessary gear, and map out your shopping trip so that you can finish just before the baby has a meltdown or needs to eat again. God help you if you have to feed them in public!

If a new mother's baby is on a two or three hour feeding schedule, and she feeds the baby right before she leaves, by the time the baby is burped and changed, she probably only has about an hour and a half to shop without doing the whole routine again. If the new mother wants to feed the baby at home and not in public, she probably only has an hour to be out before having to head back home. For these reasons, and others, participants found shopping to be challenging now that they have babies. As Heather mentions, shopping for clothing in particular has taken a back seat to the baby's demands.

I: Do you enjoy shopping for clothing for yourself now?

Heather: I don't really trust my own taste in clothes so I like to go shopping with a friend who can help me make choices. The social part is fun. I don't really like shopping on my own though. I've been ready to go shopping since the baby was born but haven't yet because it's just been hard to find the time.

Not only does Heather have to include meeting someone as part of her shopping trip, but simply finding a time to do this is an immense task with the baby in the picture.

Indeed, before having the baby, participants described planning shopping trips in terms of where to shop, what time, who to meet, and what to wear. For the most part,

however, it meant grabbing the purse, jumping in the car, and being on the way. This is not the case now that she is a mother. She must do all of the aforementioned planning, but also pack for herself and the baby. When taking things like diapers, wipes, food, snacks, bottles, changes of clothes, toys, pacifiers, strollers, etc., a new mother often needs a small bus to transport it all. Likewise, participants talked about planning and strategizing for feeding the baby. Is it better to take a bottle or breastfeed while she is out? Where will she breastfeed while she is out? How long does she have to shop before the baby needs a nap? A new mother must ask herself all of these questions when planning a shopping trip, along with where to put the baby, what to do if the baby cries, and how to try on clothing while keeping the baby occupied.

Some participants found it incredibly difficult to even attempt shopping. Aurora describes how hard it can be to shop when she does not feel comfortable in stores, or if she forgets a stroller.

Aurora: I don't enjoy shopping for clothes. Before having a child it was a little bit easier but now the baby has to be with you all the time and not all stores are shopper friendly with people that have children. Not having buggies available is hard too. Not everybody remembers to carry a stroller around all the time. And if you try to go by yourself with a baby, you can't push around a stroller and a buggy. It's pretty irritating.

Frustration with shopping is only one aspect of the process. Abby describes how lack of time is also a challenge.

Abby: Shopping for clothes is quite a challenge. As Jax gets older he is more active and sitting in a stroller in a store or dressing room are not his favorite things to do. Some days I try to watch his schedule carefully to plan a trip to the mall. I know I might get an hour or two shopping in before we have to leave. I

wish I liked it more, but it just feels like a race. And don't even get me started on trying to fit my stroller through stores. Ugh!

Among all of the participants, Lily was the one with whom I talked about shopping trips in the most detail. She mentioned things like difficulty finding places to store items when a baby is in tow, trying on clothes when the baby is getting upset, and not wanting to disturb other patrons while shopping.

I: Let's switch gears a little. How is she when you go shopping? Is she agreeable?

Lily: She's pretty mellow. I mean, it's harder just because you're taking a huge stroller, it's just not as easy breezy. Even like grocery shopping, you end up getting five items because I can't get anything in the cart anymore. I didn't think about that one. It's like clothes, I went to a store, like a little boutique the other day, and she just slept through the whole time, so that was nice, very enjoyable. And then when I can break away, I definitely try to do that. We were out of town the other day and I was like "I want to go into this store, y'all can keep strolling if you want." But she's pretty easy. We've definitely had a few times where she's like, she lets me know it's time to go and so we just head on out.

However, Lily also admits that it is not always so easy. She goes on to state,

Lily: I don't really feel comfortable going into a store and going into the dressing room and feeding quite yet. I know that after a certain point I'm probably going to be like "I don't care" and we're just going to have to do this but we're not going far far away right now, so it's pretty easy for me to get back home in enough time. We were at a restaurant out of town two weekends ago and you know, she wanted to eat, and I just had to do it and I just, I like have to do it for her but I don't feel comfortable doing it myself.

For those reasons, Lily talked about not enjoying shopping as much now that the baby is around,

I: So in general, from a purely individual standpoint, do you enjoy shopping for clothing now, or has that changed?

Lily: It's changed. I'm a pretty petite person and before it was pretty awesome because I knew my size and it was more like, oh this is too big. And now I'm trying on things and it's like, "oh this is too tight", and it's just a new feeling and um, I honestly like need to work out and I have plans and then they just go out the window because she's up all night and I'm exhausted the next morning and it's just hard. It used to be so much more fun. And now I'm like harder on myself and I just don't feel as great, then I'm like "Oh my God, you know, I need to look at whatever, and I need to provide for her breastfeeding," and it's just this huge struggle with myself.

During one focus group discussion, I asked participants where they purchase clothing now that they are mothers. Most participants laughed at the question, and responded that they had no time for shopping. Christina and Emma went on to point to the importance of convenience when shopping.

Christina: I pretty much buy all my clothes at Target. I'm there anyways.

Emma: Me too. I used to try not to spend so much but there have been times now that I'll just go to TJ Maxx, Marshalls, or Goodwill if I'm looking for something. They're just easier to shop at because I can get the girls' stuff there too. I'm good with comfy clothes but it's my work clothes that I get tired of wearing over and over again.

While a shopping trip may not have meant much in the past, a new mother may now become very excited at the idea of going shopping, especially when she goes by herself. As Melinda discussed, even a simple trip to the grocery store on one's own can be liberating,

Melinda: We were cooking dinner and we were out of potatoes and I got to go and get potatoes and that was so exciting. Like I remember the whole experience vividly you know because I had just fed him and I was like "I'll go!" You know I

remember chatting with the sales clerk for a minute and what the fruit and vegetable department looked like.

I: Yes, the grocery store is a whole new world of opportunity once you're a mother.

Melinda: Yeah, it was sort of, the whole time I was rushing because I was trying to get back to make sure that I wasn't away too long and because the food was sort of in process so it wasn't like a leisurely trip, but still, I really appreciated it.

Perhaps because shopping with a baby in tow is such a new, and often difficult, experience, new mothers find it challenging to keep up with their personal styles. In addition to this, feeling unproductive and being physically engaged with a baby all of the time can result in a new mother feeling like she may not even recognize herself anymore. These changes in the participants' lifestyles seemed to be most apparent in how they experienced attempts at appearance management.

Dressing Like a Mom

As discussed in Chapter IV, becoming a mother causes changes in a woman's body and ultimately her identity. However, there are other changes, including those that are attributed to having a baby in tow. When a woman becomes a new mother, her appearance is altered in several ways beyond her body shape and size, and how she feels about these changes illustrates the ways that a new mother's identity is constructed through her relationship with the baby during the transition to motherhood. In this section, specific clothing choices that are available and realistic for new mothers when caring for their babies will be examined, in addition to how participants, as new mothers, feel about appearance when caring for their babies.

Yoga Pants: The Choice for New Mothers

During interviews, participants frequently mentioned wearing, buying, and loving/hating yoga pants. It seems that this staple piece of clothing for new mothers is either associated with comfort, or with being forced to give up on one's own style. Some new mothers were excited to go out and purchase yoga pants before having the child, and others discussed how they are a necessity but do not lend much to personal style. Immediately after a woman has a child, wearing comfortable pants is essential for various reasons, especially if she had a c-section. Yoga pants provide this necessary comfort. They also lend to stretching, which is helpful when a new mother is teetering between sizes after having a baby. Finally, once a new mother is given permission by her doctor to exercise, yoga pants provide a look that can be worn to the grocery store as well as the gym, thereby preventing a mother from having to change outfits more than once during the day. For these reasons, all participants talked about the importance of yoga pants. For example, after having her baby, Jessica made a special shopping trip for the yoga pants shown in Figure 4.

Jessica: Well, I knew Eliza was going to be in the NICU for a while, so I decided to go out and buy some new clothes to wear while she was there. It was still mostly yoga pants and loose tops, but at least they were new. It's the only time I've said "I need this" about clothes.

I: How did you feel about buying loungewear versus more stylish clothes?

J: Ha, yeah, I guess I just considered them professional loungewear. I mean I wasn't doing much during that time, but I wanted to at least look nice and not wear my ratty old sweats.



Figure 4. Jessica's Post-Baby Self Ensemble, also known as her "Professional Loungewear"

While some participants view yoga pants as just an alternative to sweatpants, those who work outside the home seemed to view them in a more positive light. For example, Carly associates yoga pants with being able to be home with her baby after work. An outfit found on Pinterest (see Figure 5), exemplifies Carly's post-baby, at-home appearance.

Carly: When I get home from work I get into comfy clothes like yoga pants and a t-shirt with a sports bra. It makes me feel more relaxed and helps me unwind while playing with her.

I: How do you feel about dressing for work versus staying at home?

C: I would love to dress in those clothes all the time, but I have to dress professionally for work so I don't get to very often.

Stella sees things similarly, and describes her appreciation for yoga pants.

Stella: I like to wear comfortable clothes as well as things Grayson can't mess up. I could wear yoga pants, a hoodie, nursing tank, and Ugg slippers everyday now. Actually that is what I wear whenever I can.



Figure 5. While looking at Pinterest, Carly chose this outfit as one that she would wear at home, Post-Baby

In contrast to Carly and Stella, who would both be content to wear yoga pants all the time, other new mothers, such as Abby, only wear loungewear when putting together a stylish outfit proves to be too difficult.

Abby: If I'm going somewhere that other moms dress a little nicer, I make sure to look extra put-together. That gives me more confidence I think. But on days

when Jax is being difficult or hasn't slept the night before, I'll just go out in yoga pants and a t-shirt.

Indeed, based on participant's experiences, yoga pants seem to be an easy and popular clothing choice for new mothers. When faced with so many decisions during a day, it may be very appealing to not think about clothing. As Lily states, "yoga pants are an easy go-to." Indeed, it seems that this staple garment may be the 2010's version of the "mom jeans" of the 1980s.

The Gross Factor

For participants, one of the things that make yoga pants so appealing (or in contrast, unappealing) is that they do not feel bad when their comfortable loungewear gets dirty. Given that a new mother will change her baby's diaper between eight and ten times each day, her clothing often ends up "wearing" it. Newborns are also notorious for spitting up after they eat, usually on the people holding them. In addition, once a child gets to the age of five or six months, it can start eating solid foods, which is just one more thing that can wind up on a mother's clothing. And of course, there is the occasional sneeze that will also end up on someone. Unfortunately this is not the extent of the gross factor, in that, in addition to all of the unpleasant implications of a baby's lack of control over bodily fluids, there is also the difficulty participants had finding time to shower or clean up.

Spit up was the most frequently mentioned problem among participants relative to clothing and the gross factor. For example, when asked if she ever uses clothing to alter her mood, Heather stated "Yes, I will wear something nice to lift my mood a bit, to feel

like I'm not just a sloppy mom covered in spit up." Carly seconded Heather's response by saying "As a mom I am most interested in comfortable and functional clothes. Not clothes that I have to worry about ruining with drool and spit up!" Ease of care is also a concern for new mothers when it comes to clothing. Christina provides a picture of her favorite comfortable, and easy to wash, outfit, seen in Figure 6.

I: What do you wear around the house?

Christina: Normally I wear sweat pants or yoga pants and a tank top. That way I can just put a cardigan on over it if I need to go out. And it's easy to change tank tops after I get spit up on. Plus they're easy to wash.

Melinda also mentioned care as being a concern.

Melinda: I used to wear, like, cotton sweaters, but they don't stand up to being washed as often as stuff that's being spit up on needs to be. So I've been wearing the same five t-shirts until I go out shopping with him.



Figure 6. Christina's Post-Baby Self Ensemble

While wearing comfortable and easy-to-wash clothing is practical for the new mother, choices are limited. Heather explains this succinctly when asked if there are certain clothes or accessories that she does not wear when the baby is with her: “Only things that I like so much I don’t want to see them get soiled.” She also pointed to the fact that new mothers are not the only ones affected by spit up and other messes. When asked about particular brands or styles bought for the baby, she said “I don’t buy things that are expensive since all babies do is puke and poop on their clothes.” When asked if she likes dressing him, Andrea pointed to how often she changes her baby’s clothing, by saying “I change him like three times a day because he just pees on everything. I keep trying to cover him up when I change him but he somehow still does it. I do laundry a

lot!” Spouses also suffer the woes of babyhood. One participant discussed how the baby also affects her spouse’s appearance.

Melinda: She got dressed for work, and then I handed her the baby because she wanted to hold him, and he threw up all over her. So that's probably a factor too for people who are working.

I: That's true.

Melinda: She's like, "I can't touch him in the morning now."

Appearances, in terms of style of clothing, often take a back seat in the life of a new mother, but so do appearances in terms of cleanliness. When participants are constantly wearing the baby, sporting the same yoga pants everyday, and are covered in various baby fluids, a shower is often greatly desired, but sometimes can be hard to come by. It is easy to see how the relationship between mother and child can cause participants to feel unkempt and unstylish, thus impacting how they view their current sense of style, and ultimately their identities. In addition to all of this, new mothers not only have to be concerned with how they look at home, but how they look when out with their babies.

Looking Put Together

When asked “What do you want people to think when they see you and your baby out in public?” the most common response was “I want them to think that I am put-together.” Some new mothers voiced concerns about wanting others to see them as trendy or fashionable, while other new mothers stated that they did not care what others thought about how they looked. Either way, when a woman is in public with a baby, people tend to notice. As Andrea stated, “Everyone’s always looking at me because I

have a new baby. I can't go anywhere without everyone coming up to asking about the baby. So because of the extra attention I pay more attention to how I look too." Almost all new mothers interviewed in this study, at some point, mentioned that they want others to see them as put-together. Yet, the term "put together" has different meanings for different participants. For example, where Abby lives, appearances are very important and looking put-together means looking attractive and well-dressed, as her ideal self ensemble shows in Figure 7.

I: How do appearances play a role in your life now?

Abby: In South Florida, everyone is very focused on their appearance, fitness, clothes, labels. I always made sure my hair was perfect, nails done, spray tan each week. Having the right look can open doors both personally and professionally in this area. But now, I think that it's just important that I look nice, well-dressed, and put-together. We go to different Mommy and Me groups every day and that is my source of socializing. I think it's important to look approachable. Like someone other moms would want to be friends with.

For Abby, looking put-together and well-dressed is very important in regards to how others see her. In contrast, Carly suggests that looking nice is important but not a means of impressing people. She says "I want to look presentable, but I'm not out to impress anyone on a daily basis."



Figure 7. Abby's Ideal Self Ensemble

For participants, functionality is also a factor when being in public with a baby.

For example, Abby talked about the need for appropriate clothing for her outings with the baby.

Abby: I think when we started going to Mommy and Me classes, I became aware of what I was wearing. I would put on shorts or v-necks and find myself having to pull things up or down to avoid exposing myself. It was super annoying and uncomfortable!

As Abby explains, when at her Mommy and Me classes, she became more aware of her clothing due to playing with her baby on the floor. If she wore shorts, she would have to pull them down after playing with him, and if she had on a v-neck shirt, she would become aware of others being able to see down her shirt if she leaned over while playing with the baby.

Some of the participants are not overly concerned with how they look in public with their babies, while others want people to see them as “put together” moms with cute babies. However, whether it be dressing to be comfortable while taking care of the baby, dressing in clothing that they do not mind getting dirty, or attempting to make a positive impression via appearance when in public, participants often find themselves wearing clothing that is far more casual than they were accustomed to wearing before becoming mothers.

Shifting Focus

A new mother may not feel as though she looks amazing, but she likely wants others to see her baby as cute or beautiful. While some participants seemed indifferent about their own appearances, others sought to look put-together or to rekindle a bit of their pre-baby style. However, the majority of them agreed that their primary appearance-related concerns after having a baby are dressing and caring for the baby. Some participants discover early on that practical clothing is best when dressing the baby. Clothing that makes it easy to change diapers, feed, and hold or put the baby to sleep is at the top of the priority list. However, other participants love dressing up their children every day. Last, some participants view the baby as a means of shifting the focus away from themselves and their own appearances.

New Accessory

Baby wearing is an activity that has gained popularity in the past few years, as part of the “attachment parenting” concept (Sears & Sears, 2003). Infants can be worn in a sling, baby carrier, or simply carried in one’s arms. Certain products have even become

synonymous with baby wearing (ex. Baby Bjorn, Ergo baby carrier, etc.). Some participants feel that wearing one's baby helps to foster a bond between mother and child, while others feel that constantly having a baby attached to one's self is difficult to get used to and sometimes tiresome. For example, when Lane is asked by others if they can carry her baby instead of it being in the baby carrier, Lane's typical response is "It's just easier carrying her like this. She's happy and it's not too uncomfortable." However, Teresa had a different perspective:

I: Do you ever wear her in a baby carrier?

Teresa: Not really. I tried it but couldn't really get the hang of it. She felt like she was going to fall out. And I was scared I was going to hit her head on something. Plus it made me really hot.

Participants' experiences reveal that while wearing a baby might be pleasant and desirable for some mothers, for others it is yet another source of discomfort and stress in terms of acclimating to motherhood. There are also those participants who enjoy matching the baby when they go out in public. Andrea talked about how she likes to match her outfit with that of her baby when they go out.

Andrea: Church on Sundays is my favorite day because we go out. I like to dress up. It's weird but I like to match our outfits.

I: You and the baby's outfits?

Andrea: Yeah. I don't know why I started doing it, but now if I want to wear like a red dress, I will put him in something red too. It's just fun I guess.

Andrea's example highlights how she uses her baby almost as an accessory. It also illustrates that while some participants may not enjoy wearing the baby or wearing matching outfits, the practice of dressing the baby was generally talked about in a positive light.

Practicality vs. Cuteness

As mentioned above, regardless of whether the participant cares about her own appearance as a new mother, dressing the baby was a major discussion point among all participants. Whether it is because baby clothing is a new-to-them product category, or because baby clothes are tiny versions of adult clothes, most participants seemed to enjoy shopping for their babies. Some sought practicality over cuteness; specifically clothing that ensures the comfort of the baby:

Jessica: I thought I'd be more into dressing her up in cute little girls' clothes, but actually she just wears onesies all the time. It's just easier and she's more comfortable. Trying to get dresses, especially the ones that button down the back, on her is just too hard. And she hates headbands. She just keeps pulling them off.

Whereas Jessica is concerned about the baby's comfort, Christina is more concerned with ease of care. During a focus group session she stated, "I like her to look cute, but she also spits up all the time. So I really don't put her in anything besides a sleep-and-play most of the time. They're easier to wash." Stella responded, "Yes, thank God for sleep-and-plays! I wash like 20 of those things every couple days!" On the topic of care, for Keri, certain brands of sleep and plays offer the best ease of care and quality for the price.

I: Are there any brands that you prefer for her?

Keri: I like Carters a lot. I really do. They have a great quality. You can always wash their stuff. It holds up really well, always looks good. The Circo brand at Target for the price point. That's about it. Those are my staples: Carters and Target.

Indeed, based on the data, another important issue relative to practicality seems to be price. Several participants mentioned not wanting to spend a lot of money on clothing for their babies, given that they grow out of the clothing so fast, and either spit up on or mess the clothing up quickly.

Keri: She grew really fast recently, so yeah buying for her is a priority now, just because she needs things to fit into. Like, 3 month pants are so tight, I can't put her in them. But baby clothes are so cheap, just to be honest, I won't spend more than like \$10 on one item, just because I know she's going to grow out of it. Like I'm trying to be very frugal about that, which is hard, because I love clothes, and it's my daughter, but I know she's just going to grow out of it. And my mom is always sending me links to clothes and I'm like "two grad students, one income." I shop a lot at Target. You can spend like \$30 and buy like four or five outfits.

Similarly, Layla discussed purchasing baby clothing at boutiques versus specialty stores:

I: Are there brands you like for the baby or styles you like more than others?

Layla: Um, I love Carters. It just fits her well. I like Old Navy and Gap. My sister's really big on boutique stuff, like Matilda Jane and Persnickety and all that Tea and all that stuff, but I cannot justify spending \$40 or \$50 on an outfit that she's going to fit in once. So if she has those they're going to be from my mom or sister. Maybe when she gets older I'll be into that.

Catherine even talked about purchasing her son's clothing from Craigslist, because, in her opinion, boys clothing does not change in terms of style or color preference as quickly as

clothing does for girls. However, she mentioned that her mother takes issue with this approach to “dressing” her baby.

I: Are you particular about how he looks when you go out?

Catherine: No. That’s something my mom’s gotten on me about. “Are you dressing him up to go to doctor’s appointments?” “Are you dressing him up to take him to your work to show him off?” No, he just wore a onesie. Even bringing him home she was kind of upset that I didn’t get him an outfit. He just wore a onesie. I don’t really care about brands. Clothes are clothes. I get a lot of his stuff on Craigslist.

Perhaps Catherine and her mother differ in their opinions about how to dress Catherine’s son because of generational preferences, or beliefs about clothing in general. Regardless, it seems that the cost of a baby’s clothing is a consideration for many of the participants in this study, not just Catherine.

Whereas some of the participants leaned toward practical baby clothing, others seemed to very much enjoy dressing and buying clothing for their children. Abby surprised herself in terms of how much she enjoys purchasing clothing for her son.

Abby: I find that I honestly spend more time shopping for and thinking about events and outfits for Jax than I do myself. I never understood this in the past when I saw moms do this. Now I’m one of those moms!

Similarly, when Lily, Keri, and Brianna were interviewed, they all had similar responses to the question, “Do you enjoy buying for your baby?” Lily responded, “I like buying clothes for her more, because you know, it’s just fun dressing her up. And I don’t feel as guilty buying for her as much as myself.” Keri’s response was similar, in that she said

“Oh, I love it. It’s so much fun!” Brianna however, had the most enthusiastic response to the question.

I: What about dressing the baby?

Brianna: It’s a disaster. Because she’s a girl and I literally spend all of my time dressing her. (Laughter)

I: I can imagine.

Brianna: I usually change her two or three times a day and we just try clothes on. She always has a headband with her outfit. I really enjoy going into her room and organizing her closet. She has her own little stand with all of her headbands and bows to match each outfit. I’m having a lot more fun with her clothes and her style.

As Brianna’s excitement over dressing her baby suggests, for some participants, selecting clothing for the baby seems to be a surrogate means of attending to their own appearances. This is obvious in the extent to which participants’ own preferences for dressing enter into how they dress their babies.

Personal Preference

Some participants tended to have very specific preferences as to what they wanted to purchase for the baby or have the baby wear. For example, Heather did not like for her son to wear a certain color and fit of clothing.

Heather: I like him to look cute. He looks bad in red though so I try to avoid that color. And I like clothes that fit his skinny frame better than the ones that are super baggy and meant for chunky babies.

Among the participants, color is a particularly important issue regarding children’s clothing, especially in terms of girl’s clothing. During a focus group

interview, Christina said “I don’t want her to wear all pink though. I don’t like pink so I guess that’s why.” Keri also mentioned not wanting her daughter to wear too much pink.

I: Are there any brands for her or styles that you don’t like or won’t buy?

Keri: I don’t like pink. So I try to stay away from pink. I try to stay away from things that are way too girly, if that makes sense, or way too kiddish. I never buy anything with Disney characters. I’m sure that will change when she has an opinion. I like to put her in mix-matchy things. Um, and I don’t like her to match too much because I’m not a matchy matchy person. So those are the kinds of things I won’t put her in.

Lane expressed similar opinions, particularly with respect to the color pink.

Lane: I love everything that’s been bought for her. I’ve only taken back two things because I just would not dress my child in them. One was the frilliest thing I’ve ever seen. It had like pink, purple, orange, and all these different color tutus, and it was just “no”. So I took that back. And then there was one that was just way too much pink and it was a tutu and it was all pink. It was really big and just, those are the only two things I’ve taken back. Now I’ve taken other things back to change sizes but I wouldn’t buy anything different than what people have bought me. And I think most people know that I don’t like, you know, super frilly stuff or super girly, but I love everything that she has. And I think I would rather go shopping for her because it’s just so cute.

In contrast, Teresa had a more minimalist viewpoint and said “I don’t like too much going on with her. You know, like too many frills or ruffles or whatever. I do have a pink/purple preference though. And pretty much everything comes from Target.”

It seems that participants with baby girls are more concerned about color and style than those with boys. The new mothers with boys are more concerned with ease of care and price. For example, Catherine talked about the lack of choices among boy’s clothing versus girl’s clothing.

I: Do you think it would be different if you had a girl?

Catherine: Girls have much more fun clothing. I just did some shopping for him. They just have so many more options. They're so much more colorful whereas boys don't really have that many options. So that's been the only thing. If he were a girl, he'd probably just get more new stuff because there are so many cool things. But with boys it's kind of the same stuff that's been popular forever so there's no reason to get everything new.

When a new mother has her baby with her in public, the attention that she might normally garner is divided and most attention is paid to her baby. Some participants enjoy this because it takes attention off of them, and thus off of their own appearances, which they often feel are lacking due to constant baby needs. Other participants enjoy the positive attention that the child receives because it gives them a sense of validation that they are taking care of the baby "correctly." Participants tend to feel frustrated about how their own appearances have taken a negative turn since having their babies, but on the other hand, they enjoy spending more time dressing up their children for others to praise, instead of spending time on their own appearances. This is yet another example of the contradictory nature of motherhood as expressed by participants and reflective of the major identity transition they are experiencing.

Summary

In this chapter, I examined the relationship between the new mother and her baby in terms of the role that this relationship plays in changes to her lifestyle and consumption choices. Participants were faced with changing their lifestyles to accommodate their babies and this impacted their decision making regarding appearance. In most cases, the participant's focus shifted from her own appearance to that of the baby.

In the next chapter, the third and final thematic interpretation chapter, the role that others (e.g. spouse, family, and friends) play in terms of a new mother's identity is discussed.

CHAPTER VI

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION PART III: ME, BABY, AND THE WORLD

Thus far, the interpretation of data concerning new mothers and their experiences with appearance and consumption issues has centered on how identity changes after bringing a baby into the world. In this chapter, the focus is on those around the new mother. Specifically of concern are topics such as how a new mother wants others to see her, why this is important, and what it means in terms of how her identity as a mother is constructed. Comparisons to other mothers, how work colleagues view them as new mothers, and societal expectations all emerged as important concerns among the participants. In addition to these topics, the notion of dressing for others was also frequently brought up by participants.

Although other people probably do not pay as much attention as participants may think they do, it became clear that there is a great deal of concern among participants as to what others think about them as new mothers. Most participants stressed the importance of wanting people to see her as a new mother who is in control, or one that looks “put-together.” Exuding confidence to other mothers, friends, and family was also mentioned as being important to participants. Even though this is a difficult and challenging transition in a woman’s life, the opinions of others seem to be extremely important, perhaps because those opinions can help to validate how she sees herself as a mother, thereby helping her understand who she is now that she is a mother.

In this chapter I will examine the relationships between the new mother and the world she interacts with, particularly in terms of appearance and consumption. Three themes emerged from the data regarding these relationships and with respect to participants' experiences with the transition to motherhood: (1) *Seemingly Under Control*, (2) *The Influencers*, and (3) *Societal Expectations*. All of the themes in this chapter are inter-related and each is dependent on the other to create a holistic understanding of the experience of becoming a mother. In particular, the concepts of appearance and consumption are explored within each theme and are discussed as links between themes.

Seemingly Under Control

Almost every participant interviewed for this study mentioned a desire for others to see her as put-together, in control, or looking like she has it “all together.” This notion of looking put-together may come from societal or cultural expectations, in that participants may feel as though looking put-together is a social norm or an expectation for women in general. Or participants may simply strive to look put-together because when others validate their feelings and tell them they look like they “have it together,” it helps them to feel as though they have some control over the transition that they are experiencing. It is possible that if a new mother feels in control, even if only about her looks, she may feel more secure in her role as a mother. In turn, feeling more secure can help to build confidence and self-esteem. As Carly illustrates, and is shown in Figure 8, looking put-together is important for how she feels about herself.

I: How do you feel about this outfit (ideal self ensemble)?

Carly: I feel like this outfit is something that would be functional as a mom, but still makes me feel put-together and like I put forth effort to get dressed.

I: Is it important to you that you achieve this particular look?

Carly: It is important to me because I want my daughter to grow up feeling good about the way she looks and I want to be a good role model for that. This outfit would make me feel good about myself.

Carly's comment is a general example of how participants equate clothing with self-esteem. During a tumultuous time in one's life, such as immediately after becoming a mother, establishing even a little bit of confidence can be a psychological and emotional boost. The various ways that participants try to create and maintain a put-together or controlled appearance when in public with the baby, when around other moms, and when around family members are examined in this section.



Figure 8. Carly's Ideal Self Ensemble, found on Pinterest

Out with Baby

As discussed in Chapter IV, and as almost any new mom will attest to, taking an infant out into the world for the first time is an anxiety inducing experience. Figuring out the logistics of how to do so is the first step, but once that is complete, a new mother also worries about how her baby will behave in public. She may be nervous that the baby will suddenly get hungry and cry, or just cry in general, because that is what babies do. When babies cry in public, it can make a new mother feel embarrassed, especially if the crying attracts attention. In addition to this concern, new mothers also fear diapers that suddenly (and desperately) need to be changed. However, perhaps more than anything, a new mother may fear that others see her as unfit, or as a mother who is not in control of her child or herself. Lily describes a situation in which she was in a store and her baby started crying.

I: How do you feel when she decides it's time to go and has a fit?

Lily: I kind of start panicking. I just don't want to be that person that has a kid flipping out. When I see toddlers and stuff breaking down, you really can't control that and I feel bad for the parents, like I kind of have control to take her out, and clearly she's upset, so I don't want to put her through that either. So I try to scoot as quickly as possible.

From Lily's perspective, she worries about whether her child's crying will bother other people, but she also feels bad for her child. Her solution then is to "take control" of the situation and leave the store as quickly as possible. In a similar vein, Layla also discussed how hard it is to take a baby out.

Layla: She had her first meltdown in the dressing room the other day. Which was hard. Luckily my mother-in-law was there so she could take her, but I was like “Oh my gosh. What if I was by myself?” I’d have to leave ‘cause she was just screaming.

Had she been shopping alone, Layla would have left with her crying infant, just as Lily did. However Layla’s mother-in-law was with her, which was one of the reasons that she went shopping in the first place.

Interestingly, Keri enjoys shopping with her infant because she often sleeps while in the stroller.

I: Does she do pretty well when you’re shopping?

Keri: She sleeps. And I make sure I go during her naptime. If I go after 5, it’s like all hell’s broken loose. If I take her to Target at that time, it’s like she’s crying and screaming. It’s crazy.

In this example, while Keri might enjoy taking her daughter shopping, she is careful about taking her at specific times so that the baby does not start crying. She alludes to another reason as to why being out with babies is stressful (aside from the fact that their crying attracts attention): when a new mother is trying to focus on the task of purchasing products and her infant starts crying, she finds it difficult to maintain focus and complete the task.

Lane and Layla also mention yet another situation that often occurs when new mothers are out with their babies, and that is other people stopping to talk to them. Lane was discussing how long shopping takes with a baby, and said “And then other people are always stopping to look at her and say how cute she is, and it just takes forever!” Layla

also talked about people stopping to see the baby, or even running into people that she knows when shopping: “Last time I went to Target near where I teach and ran into like three people I knew, which was great.” In this statement, Layla was being a bit sarcastic, as she had previously been discussing the demise of her appearance since having a baby. She also said, “I care more about how she looks anyways. When you have a baby, nobody cares how you look. They look at her and how cute she is.” Indeed, a baby can take the attention off of the new mother when out in public, which may give a little relief to some new mothers who feel as though their appearances have taken a back seat to childcare. Participants also felt relief when their children looked nice or cute, because it made them feel like they had the new motherhood experience “under control.”

Other Moms

Some participants talked about how they feel about their appearances when around other mothers. Lynn’s remarks suggest that she uses her friends and sister-in-law for clothing ideas, but generally just tries to avoid looking “like a mom.”

Lynn: I guess I look at my sister-in-law for style advice, or I don’t know, how to dress or something, as a mom. She’s always cute and trendy, so I hope she thinks I am too. And my friends at work who are moms, we normally wear the same things. I just don’t want to look like, um, you know, like a mom, like frumpy or something.

Similarly, Christina described using her friends who are mothers as style references, by saying “I look at what my friends wear, and I guess I try to look similar to them.” Abby is also concerned about what other mothers thought of her appearance.

I: When you get dressed, do you consider anyone's opinions regarding what you wear?

Abby: I typically try to pick outfits that I think make me look put-together and like I'm in control. I consider what the other mommies will think and compare the type of outfit I choose to the types of outfits that I see them wear when we are together. I consider these opinions because I want to feel comfortable and part of the group.

As Abby points out, appearance can play an important role in how she fits in with her group of peers. She directly mentions wanting to be “in control” and to look “put-together,” and talks about how she bases her wardrobe on what the other new mothers are wearing. Figure 9 shows an example of how Abby dresses for Mommy and Me class. This is a very vivid example of how important appearances can be for some new mothers, especially when they are attempting to fit in a group of women who are going through similar life situations. For some participants, finding others who are going through similar experiences, and mirroring the appearances and action of them, can be a way of understanding and navigating their own experiences.



Figure 9. Abby and her son at Mommy and Me Class

Layla also talked about how her Mommy and Me group influences how she feels about her appearance.

Layla: Some of those women are so put-together. They're in like full makeup and dressed to the nines and stuff and I'm like "Oh my gosh. How did they do that?" You know? I was glad that I got to use my hair dryer today. So yeah, I try to look put-together, but honestly I care less about my looks than I did before I was pregnant.

While Abby strives to fit in with her Mommy and Me cohort, Layla wonders how they manage to look so put-together, but admits that she does not care as much about her looks since becoming a mother. Layla later explained that she tries to go out as much as possible, but because it is difficult to do so, her appearance has taken a back seat to being able to simply leave the house. As she put it, "I try to look like I'm put together whenever I go out, but it's hard." When discussing her pre-baby self, she explained "I would never have left the house the way that I leave the house now." This change in her appearance also goes against how she was brought up:

Layla: My mom was always put together when she left the house, so that was kind of instilled in us: that you need to look presentable when you leave the house. You shouldn't go out in yoga pants (like I do), but that's just how she is. I care more about what she (the baby) looks like than what I look like.

Not only are other new mothers a factor in Layla's views on appearance, but her own mother is a major influence in how she feels about the subject. While Layla talks about not caring about her looks so much since becoming a mother, she still hints that women should look presentable or put-together when leaving the house, and that her appearance is not always what she would like for it to be when in public. Clearly, for some

participants, their own mother's opinions and that of other family members can be a major factor in the extent to which they use appearances to establish control in their new role.

Family

Layla's example from above illustrates how her own mother influences how she feels about her appearance. However, most participants described feeling more relaxed about their appearances when around family members than when around non-family. For example, Aurora said, "If going out to dinner, I will dress up a little more than going to a family member's home." When asked if the participants were concerned with other people's opinions regarding what they wear, some responded that their husbands have some influence, while others mentioned friends. Interestingly, very few participants mentioned family members as being an influence. This response, or lack thereof, is interesting, in that it may suggest that while a new mother feels pressure to have everything under control when in public or when around other new mothers, she can relax and let go of that need for control when around her family.

In contrast, one participant actually likes to dress up more when she is around family. As Diedre explained, "I'll put on a skirt and nice top when we go see my family, for a party or something. And I might put on makeup, but not much." While Deidre tends to dress very casually, many of her family members wear dressier clothing, even for casual social situations, so she feels more pressure to wear something other than sweatpants when around them. She goes on to say, "It just makes me feel better to wear something nice, so they don't look at me like I'm a mess." Obviously, maintaining the

appearance of control is very important to this participant. Interestingly, when in public Deidre is not as concerned about how she looks, especially when at work. She is a nurse and her work uniform consists of wearing scrubs.

Whether around family members or at work, Diedre, as well as other participants, have a lot to say about the influence of others on their appearances, as will be discussed in the next section. Spouses and other women in particular seem to have the most influence on how a new mother views herself and therefore, how she feels about herself as a mother.

Influencers

Based on the interpretation of participant responses, certain people have more influence than others on how a new mother views herself. Those people are typically the new mother's spouse and other women, including her own mother, friends, other moms, and work colleagues. As will be discussed in this section, while a spouse may have some influence over how a new mother views her appearance, other women seem to be a greater source of influence, likely because they serve as sources for comparison with the new mother.

Spouses

Each participant was asked whether there are people in her life whose opinions about how she looks matter. The participant's spouse was almost always mentioned, although typically in a positive light. Most participants responded that they may ask their spouses how they look in particular outfits, but that their spouses usually either do not have an opinion or give a positive response. However, Diedre did suggest that she takes

her husband's opinions seriously by saying, "He doesn't care. He never says anything about how I look. But if he does say that something is too, whatever, I listen." Likewise, Keri said, "If he says anything about what I'm wearing, I usually pay attention. He doesn't usually comment, so when he does, there's probably a good reason."

Other participants laughed when asked whether their husbands offer opinions. For example, Heather replied, "I often ask my husband, but we have different tastes so I don't always listen." Layla also asks her husband how she looks, and describes the experience by saying, "I'll ask him how I look, but I don't really know why. He'll barely look up and say, 'Yeah, you look good.' It's pretty useless actually." None of the participants talked about spouses saying anything negative except for Deidre, who, when discussing her ex-husband, talked about how concerned he was with her appearance.

I: Now you said that your ex-husband did care a lot about your appearance though?

Deidre: Yeah, he was military, so I don't know if it was that or if it was because I was so much younger than him, but he didn't want me to leave the house without makeup on and my hair done. He always wanted me to wear dresses and skirts. My husband now doesn't care what I look like.

Throughout our interview, Deidre talked about how much she enjoys dressing casually. In this case, it could be prompted by the negative remarks regarding her appearance she received from her ex-husband, reinforced by positive comments provided by her current husband, which, when combined, foster her enjoyment of dressing in casual clothing.

Abby talked about how her husband influenced what she wore before becoming a mother. Figure 10 shows her dressed for a night out with her husband.

Abby: This was a dress I wore one night when my husband and another couple were going out to dinner and to a couple of clubs afterwards. I was incredibly in shape and felt great about myself and amazing in this dress. My husband loved the way I looked and I got a ton of compliments and hit on by other guys.

However, now that she is a mother, Abby's appearance has changed and she explains that she feels sorry for her husband because she does not dress like she used to. Abby provided the photo in Figure 10 as a means to show how her pre-baby self dressed, and to highlight the contrast between how she used to dress and how she dresses now that she is a mother.

Abby: Wearing things that are low cut, shorter skirts or dresses, and high heels are out of the question right now. There is too much bending, chasing, crawling, etc. going on. When I am at home, anything goes. My poor husband! Some days Jax and I don't even get out of our pajamas. It's one less thing to worry about, and less laundry!

In this example, it seems as though Abby's appearance is an important part of her relationship with her husband. She says that he is supportive of how she looks as a mother, but in her comment, it becomes apparent that she would dress more attractively for him than her status as a full-time, stay-at-home-mom allows.



Figure 10. Abby and her husband going on a date, Pre-Baby

Christina also talked about wanting to be attractive for her husband.

Christina: Wanting to be attractive to my husband plays a role in how I want to look. Luckily, I have a husband who finds me beautiful even when I feel my worst, and tells me this. But I still want to improve on myself and part of that motivation definitely stems from wanting to be more attractive for him.

Christina's husband is supportive, but she still feels pressure to look attractive for him.

In a similar vein, Bethany feels as though she should look a certain way for her husband.

Bethany: I want to look good for my husband. I want him to be proud of me. So if we're going to be somewhere with his friends or people he works with, I feel like I need to do my hair and put on some makeup. Not look frumpy.

Interestingly, the notion of not looking frumpy was mentioned several times by participants during the interviews. This may be due to societal pressures or a need to build self-esteem. Regardless, how others view them as new mothers is incredibly important to participants. Interestingly, though a spouse's opinion can be important,

participants suggest that it is in fact other women's opinions that play a far more important role in how they feel about their appearances.

Other Women

According to participants, other females play a very important role in the life of a new mother. Whether it is her mother, sister, friend, Mommy and Me group, or work colleague, women serve as points of comparison, expectation-setters, and mirrors for new mothers. For example, when asked if she is concerned with other's opinions about how she looks, Heather mentions wanting to look nice for her husband, but says, "It does mean something when my friends say they like what I'm wearing. It makes me feel like I look good." She implies that while her husband's opinion is important, the opinions of her friends are even more so. The opinions of friends seem to validate her identity, in that if they think that she looks good, she must not be out of touch with what is popular or trendy. Likewise, Lily responds to the question by saying, "With my friends, I think they look put-together, so I think 'I can do it too!'" She wants to mirror her friends by looking put-together. Wearing the shirts in Figure 11 are one way that she does this. Lily feels that they are all going through the same experience, and even if they all handle it differently, she thinks that she should be able to look as put-together as they do. Lily also talked about how she feels around her friends who are not mothers.

I: Do you dress differently around those friends, the ones who don't have kids?

Lily: Um, I mean I guess I would make a conscious effort to look cute or whatever, but I feel more comfortable not having to do it up because they are watching me, and this is a first for them, like, "Oh, this is what motherhood is," so I think they're not more accepting, but they don't care as much because it's not happening to them. And also my friends in other places, are not as in to looking

cute, they're career driven, and it's not really on their radar. I mean they care about clothes, but not as much.



Figure 11. Some of Lily's Post-Baby Self Shirts

Christina talked about how her friends and family serve as influences regarding how she looks. Most of the friends she discussed are mothers as well.

Christina: Having had the same group of friends throughout my life, I would have to say, yes, I have always compared myself to my friend's bodies. And the fact that they're all beautiful and size 0's has always made me insecure, being a larger size, even when I was at a good size for my own body type. It's the same with family, having two sisters that have always been a lot smaller reminds me of being larger and provides a constant comparison, even if it is unrealistic.

In Christina's example, it is clear that she compares her appearance to that of friends and sisters, and feels somewhat inadequate because of this. Emma, too, discussed how her family plays a role in how she feels about appearance.

Emma: I would definitely say I compare myself to others. Husbands and family and friends are definitely an influence when it comes to how you look, especially if they are also concerned about health, weight, and nutrition! My mom is a

fitness instructor, so I have always wanted her to think that I look right, or look like I am healthy. Her opinion definitely matters to me.

For some participants, it seems that no one person's opinion matters more than a mother. In Emma's case, her mother embodies health and fitness, so she has always felt pressure to look attractive and fit. Lily also mentions valuing her mother's opinion about how she looks, for example when wearing the dress in Figure 12.

Lily: I bought a dress for this engagement party and I put it on and I was sitting at my parent's house and I went downstairs and I just knew it wasn't going to happen without Spanx or something and I didn't have Spanx. I was like "Be honest mom" and she was so tactful in the way she said it, like "maybe in a little bit," and I trusted her opinion. I don't want to look like a fool.

Lily's mother suggested that she may want to wait a while longer before trying to wear the dress, as it apparently did not fit quite right. Her mother was insinuating that she may lose more weight from her pregnancy and the dress may fit better after she did so. Lily did not seem to feel any pressure by her mother's opinion, but instead trusted it completely and wanted her mother to be honest with her.



Figure 12. Lily's Ideal Self Ensemble

When discussing whether she values other's opinions regarding what she wears or looks like, Teresa replied, "I don't really ask my husband's opinions about what I'm wearing. I mean we dress for other women, right?" Her comment reflects a common sentiment in society, which is that women do not dress to impress or attract men, but instead dress to impress other women. Validation from other women regarding how they look can often mean more to a woman than validation from a man or her spouse. This may be because if other women claim that a woman looks nice, the woman may feel that she "fits in," which can help her understand her identity more clearly. Teresa goes on to say, "There is a girl I work with and she's in incredible shape and just looks hot! She

doesn't have kids, and I know I shouldn't compare myself to her, but I still do. I want to look hot too!"

On the other hand, one participant, Aurora, adamantly expressed the opposite viewpoint when asked whether others influence her appearance.

I: When you get dressed, do you consider anyone's opinions regarding what you wear?

Aurora: The only time I consider anyone else's opinion on the way I dress is if I am going on a job interview or to a specific place that requires a certain dress code. I do not base my self-worth on the opinions of strangers, therefore I do not care what they think of how I look unless it is for a job interview or a place with a dress code.

According to this participant, other people do not have an impact on what she wears, especially if she does not know them personally. While Aurora is not one to compare herself to others, many participants do. Although there are likely many reasons as to why new mothers compare themselves to others and want to look attractive, based on the data collected for this dissertation, one of the biggest seems to be expectations set by society.

Societal Expectations

Whether one listens to the news, reads Facebook news feeds, or flips through a magazine, it is common to find several articles regarding mothering in today's world. Motherhood is a popular topic for several potential reasons. First of all, women are always becoming mothers. Second, trends in parenting are always evolving, and are usually polarizing, which makes for a consistent stream of information available for viewing and concomitant discussion. Social media has also helped spread these streams of thought to women who are planning on becoming mothers and to women who have

recently become mothers. There is perhaps no other cohort of people who search for advice on the Internet more than new mothers. From Googling topics such as breastfeeding, to infant sleep habits and why babies cry, a new mother is inundated with messages about how a mother should look, act, and feel.

In this section, I explore societal norms in terms of mothering, how celebrities as new mothers are viewed, and the notion of the “do-it-all-mom.” These topics are addressed in order to better understand some of the external factors that influence a new mother’s experience. Appearance is certainly a part of this experience, and is examined in terms of the expectations that society places on new mothers regarding this topic.

Norms

Some may say that the social norms in terms of mothering today are inconsistent, as many topics have opposite and contradictory viewpoints. For example, in regards to breastfeeding, there are those who claim that breastfeeding is the only healthy way to feed a baby, while others stress the nutritional benefits of formula (Allen & Hector, 2005; Lee, 2007). In terms of baby wearing, some mothers feel that babies should be carried on the mother all of the time, while others choose to place their children in strollers or car seats. Infant sleeping habits are particularly close to the hearts of many mothers, with some encouraging co-sleeping and others pushing the cry-it-out method. However, while the thoughts and preferences of many topics related to motherhood are divided, there are certain issues around which most participants, as new mothers, agree.

One such issue is that a new mother should at least strive to look put-together. While this may be unrealistic at times, almost all participants mentioned that a primary

goal when in public is to look put-together. This suggests that however unattainable or far-fetched this ideal is, new mothers feel pressure to look this way when in public. However, this is not the only unrealistic goal that new mothers seem to have. Many participants also indicated that they want their children to be clean, well-dressed, and well-behaved when in public. This is perhaps even more difficult to achieve than looking put together, because most children are not well-behaved when in public, regardless of whether their mothers want them to be. Lane said, “I want people to look at her and think she’s cute. And I don’t want her to cry when we’re out because I don’t want to bother people or have people think she’s not a good baby.” Lane’s points suggest that a new mother may want others to view her child as not only attractive, but also as well-behaved, and even at the infant stage. Most likely this is because she feels that her child’s behavior reflects on her mothering skills. There is little wonder as to why new mothers feel pressure to appear as though they “have it together” when in public, when these goals are ingrained so early in life.

Another societal norm that participants seem to adhere to is the desire to be a trendy or fashionable mom (or at least one who has not “let herself go”). Brianna talked about her desire to appear this way in public.

Brianna: I guess I want people to think I’m a cute mom, and fashionable, yeah. I’ve never been trendy really, but I don’t want people to see me and think, “She’s really let herself go!”

Brianna is not concerned with wearing the most up-to-date clothing, but she also does not want to garner negative reactions from people. Teresa however, talked about how she

tries hard to look fashionable and put-together, but says, “I commend those who can wear whatever they want and look terrible and be ok with it.” This point may have been said in a slightly sarcastic tone, but she does seem to be somewhat envious of those who do not care so much about what others think. Lynn, on the other hand, said “I feel like the older I get, the more I’m like, ‘Oh, who cares!’, and I hate that.” While she sometimes does not want to dress up or appear fashionable, she feels guilty for feeling that way; perhaps because of the norms that women in the US face, which expect that women look nice and put-together when in public.

Keri talked a bit about how she is attempting to get her sense of style back now that she is a mother.

Keri: I looked at my husband and I was getting dressed and I was like, “Do I look like a mom?” I just thought I looked like a mom for some reason. Maybe because the baby was with me. I finally feel like I’m getting my sense of style back though.

I: Are there any particular looks that are you trying to avoid right now?

Keri: Just like, I don’t know, I don’t want to have an outfit that is piece-by-piece out of a catalog, if that makes sense.

I: Yeah.

Keri: Cause I’ve never dressed like that before. But it’s hard because I don’t have time to put things together, so it’s hard negotiating that, like finding the time to put things together. I guess just not looking so stereotypical, and still retaining my vintage store pieces, like my nicer things.

Keri described her sense of style as a bit eclectic, and actually mentioned that she likes to go against style norms too. She illustrates this by saying that she does not like outfits that are matchy. She also brings up an interesting point, in that it takes a bit more time to put

together outfits that are not bought as ensembles. She tries to continue to achieve the eclectic look, but now that she is a mother, struggles to find and justify the time that it takes to do so.

Another common belief that participants share is that mothers (new or otherwise) should not wear clothing that shows a lot of skin, such as shirts that show cleavage, or short skirts. For example, Andrea said, “Well, I don’t really think I avoid wearing anything in particular, just not anything short or anything that shows my chest. But I wouldn’t have done that anyways.” Likewise, when asked if she would wear a two-piece bathing suit now, Jessica stated “Probably not. I guess cause I’m a mom now, I’d rather be more modest.” For most participants, this was the common sentiment; that they would avoid wearing skin-revealing clothing, but that they would have avoided that type of clothing prior to being a new mother. Carly, too, says, “I think mothers can be trendy and still wear clothes that cover their bodies. I see a lot of mothers that wear clothes that are not functional for being a mother, such as short dresses and low-cut tops.” Yet, this may be due to age more than becoming a mother. As Lily states, “I’m too old to be wearing low-cut shirts like that, or shirts without backs. Those were for my college days.”

While most participants regard societal norms concerning mothering as important and relevant to them, only some participants admit to feeling societal pressure from magazines and websites in terms of how celebrity new mothers are viewed and photographed. However, even if participants do not seem to care about the appearance of

celebrity mothers, they still indicate that they feel pressure to look good from these sources.

Celebrities

When asked if celebrities who are new mothers influence participants' feelings about appearance, most, like Christina, responded with "No, that really doesn't influence me at all." Abby went a little more into why she is not influenced by celebrities.

Abby: As far as an image I try to portray, I constantly find myself at a crossroads. I just turned 31. I still feel like I am young and in good shape, so I want to dress trendy and in a figure-flattering way, like the way you see the beautiful celebrity mothers dress. Unfortunately they have personal stylists, makeup artists, to pull them together while I am a one-woman show. I do the best I can but am kind of bored with the basic way I dress. Most often I'm in jeans or shorts and a tee shirt and sandals. Practicality is key.

Abby talks about wanting to look fashionable, like the celebrity mothers, but understands that there is a very good reason they look like they do. Most celebrities have a lot of money, which affords them the ability to hire many professionals to help them with childcare, fitness, cooking, shopping, etc. It seems that most participants understand this and do not compare themselves to famous new mothers because of it.

Catherine took another approach to the topic, by discussing how celebrity new mothers are appearing more natural in the media.

Catherine: It's good. Especially this batch of them. It's been more casual. So they post a lot of pictures without makeup, them being out in public without makeup. So I feel like in the past when they'd still overdo it, now they're showing more of the realistic stuff. Like the one from the morning news show that just had her baby.

I: Oh, Savannah Guthrie from the Today Show?

Catherine: Yeah, she posted her picture without makeup and everyone was all surprised. I think that's been kind of nice, everyone being more realistic about it, versus in the past, I think they were more still had to be fancy and the fakeness.

Even if celebrity new mothers do come across as appearing more realistic today, they still provide another point of comparison for new mothers, and, based on participant responses, it is clear that new mothers do not need to feel any additional pressure during this transition. As Lane's interview suggests, while she claims to not be directly influenced by celebrities, she still admits to watching how they "do" motherhood.

Lane: I think that she is beautiful (Kelly Clarkson) but she has gotten a lot of crap for getting bigger after having her baby. I guess it would be harder if you had everyone looking at you like that. At least, even if I don't lose the weight quick, I don't have to be on TV! She seems like it doesn't really bother her though.

In this example, Lane is using Kelly Clarkson as a reference point in terms of feeling good about herself because she realizes that while celebrities may have extra help and monetary resources, they also are in the public eye and are scrutinized by everyone. Deidre also supported this notion when talking about Beyonce. She said "I wouldn't trade places with her if I had to. I mean she's in great shape and looks great, but I don't know, that's a lot of pressure." Participants seemed very grounded when talking about celebrities, in that they watch them and mostly admire their post-baby bodies, but realize that there is a price attached to looking great.

When asked whether celebrities who are new mothers influence how they feel about their appearances as new mothers, several participants, such as Jessica, responded

with “No, not really.” This response may point to the fact that today it seems as though there are so many celebrities that it is difficult to pay attention to any one in particular. It is commonplace to view information about celebrities everywhere online and in magazines, therefore people may be more apt to gloss over that information and not pay much attention to it. However, while participants may not be influenced by celebrities who are new mothers, they are still influenced by the societal notion that “good moms” do-it-all, which is a concept prevalent in all realms of society.

The Do-It-All Mom

Although participants may understand that they will not look like celebrities due to major differences in lifestyle, most nevertheless view motherhood as a kind of “superhero” role. When asked what an ideal mother would look like or do, participants’ responses were almost impossible to achieve, as no person on earth could ever live up to such ideals. Yet, these responses highlight the standards that mothers hold themselves, as well as other mothers to. For example, in a focus group discussion, Emma, Stella, Lynn, and Christina talk about what the ideal mother looks and acts like.

I: What do you think the “ideal” mother looks/acts like?

Stella: Hmm, the ideal mother has everything together, her house, husband, herself, children. She does this all and works 40 hours a week outside the home. She makes time for herself, time for her family and friends.

Christina: Yeah, and she gets enough sleep, keeps her house clean, and spends time with the kids and plays games with them instead of just letting them watch TV. She makes home-cooked meals and stays in touch with friends and family too. Oh, and does everything Pinterest-perfect!

I: That’s quite a mother! (Laughter from group)

Lynn: Damn. I'm not even close to this!

Emma: And I think she should be able to handle any situation, and balance her career and family. And don't forget workout!

Clearly, even the participants themselves acknowledge that these expectations are unrealistic for any one person. However, they are still the expectations that new mothers try to meet. It is interesting that new mothers hold themselves to such high standards, even when they are unrealistic. As Teresa claims, "I want people to look at me and think, 'How does she do it?!'" However, this is not the case for all mothers. Aurora's feelings about conforming to others' standards could be described as more self-aware and blunt.

Aurora: To me, and from what I have seen, the only people that solely change their appearance because they become a mother, is because they have some ideal image in their head of how they think they should do instead of just doing what they want to do. Usually those are the people that are not as content with themselves.

Yet, in many cases, caring about how others see you is part of fitting in with society. Heather, who is a working mother, discusses her feelings about how she is viewed as a mother in the workplace.

Heather: It's important to me to have a professional persona and professional clothing, especially knowing how much discrimination women and mothers face in the work world.

I: What kind of discrimination do mothers face, in particular?

Heather: Just that if you're a working mom, I feel like you're supposed to be 100% at work, and like not mention your family, or have your family's needs come before work. It's unfair, but for example, I always feel guilty or bad if I have to leave work or cancel a meeting because of my kids. I feel like people

look at me like, “Oh, she’s a mom. Her work is always going to come last.” And there’s the wage penalty, of course. Don’t get me started!

In a recent article about millennial dads, Miller (2015) wrote, “Another paradox of the 21st century is that even as the caretakers of the past, women have gone to work, the standards we apply to parents are greater than ever” (p.2). There are more and more women going to work, while men retain somewhat traditional working roles (even if they would prefer more egalitarian relationships), alongside ever-increasing parenting standards. It really is a culture of “do it all” when it comes to motherhood, and this point is not lost on the participants of this study.

In addition to feeling the need to be “superwomen” in terms of their careers, many participants talked about feeling pressure when it comes to breastfeeding. As discussed in Chapter IV, whether a new mother chooses to breastfeed can be a controversial decision. Some women strongly encourage breastfeeding, while others take a more relaxed approach. Carly only breastfed her baby for a short while, saying “Before my experience with breastfeeding, I had no idea how difficult breastfeeding would be and now I realize that some people are way too hard on people for formula feeding their babies.” Caitlin, who is still breastfeeding her child at five months, says “I enjoy it, but wish there was less societal pressure for mothers to exclusively breastfeed, as it does not feel natural whatsoever in the beginning.” Both participants hint at an unspoken assumption that as a new mother, you will at least attempt to breastfeed your child because that is the natural thing to do. However, as these participants suggest, this process is not something that just happens. Often new mothers start the process thinking

that things will happen naturally, and when breastfeeding the child is difficult, they become disappointed.

Participants may logically recognize that they are not able to do everything under the sun once becoming a mother; however the desire to be able to do this is strong. Perhaps due to societal pressure from the media, celebrities, or simply pressure that they put on themselves, participants feel an overwhelming urge to be seen as perfect mothers and Superwomen. Given that the demands of motherhood are extensive, it may be a self-esteem boost to think of oneself this way, however when it comes to appearance, most participants still seemed exasperated and felt challenged by the transition they are experiencing.

Summary

In this chapter, the ways that participants interact with the world and those in it were examined, and especially how they feel about their appearances relative to others. Gaining a sense of control over the experience of becoming a mother is an important issue for participants, especially when out in public with the baby, and when around other mothers. The influence of spouses and other women on the participant's appearance is also of concern, and found to be very important to both understanding and verifying her role as a mother. Finally, societal norms and the expectation to do-it-all surfaced as important to understanding what new mothers expect of themselves, and was found to be a major influence on how participants evaluate themselves. In the next chapter, I examine the thematic interpretation of data through a more theoretical lens and discuss how the findings address issues within the literature on identity and transition.

CHAPTER VII

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interpreting the experiences of the participants in this study helps to better understand what it is like to become a new mother and how the identities of new mothers are shaped through appearance and consumption. Discussing the topics and issues that are important to new motherhood with participants, alone and in a group setting, helps to provide a better understanding of how becoming a mother plays an important role in the evolution of a woman's identity.

In this chapter, the conceptual relevance of the thematic interpretation is discussed. This chapter is divided into five parts reflecting larger issues that emerged from the interpretation of the data, including: (1) *Sudden Transformation*, (2) *Control*, (3) *Ambivalence*, (4) *Tension*, and (5) *Resulting Identity*. Findings from the data will also be articulated within each section through the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, and the concept of the self in order to better understand the experiences of participants. Issues that were discussed in Chapter II as important to shaping the study are examined in light of the thematic interpretation, and findings are considered relative to the broader research goals and objectives that guide the study. The three objectives of the study are: (1) to examine how new mothers use appearance to establish identity, (2) to investigate the meanings new mothers assign to appearance, and

(3) to understand the role of these meanings in shaping their identities as new mothers. Examining appearance-related consumption behaviors of new mothers addresses the first objective by revealing how consumption helps a new mother establish her identity. Exploring the data concerning how and why appearance is important to women in this new role helps to address the second and third objectives.

In the first part of the chapter, the sudden transformation to motherhood is examined and analyzed in terms of how this role change affects a new mother's lifestyle and identity. In this section, I examine the participants' experiences in terms of how the process of becoming a new mother is more of a sudden transformation instead of a gradual one. Looking at how this transformation affects the new mother's lifestyle and resulting identity helps to explain how a new mother begins to portray the role of mother to herself and others.

In the second part of the chapter, I examine the notion of control, in terms of why and how participants use control as a mechanism for coping with the transition to motherhood. I seek to illuminate the ways that many of the participants attempt to control various aspects of their lives, specifically how they dress, look, act, and show off their babies, in order to feel in control and as though they had the transition to motherhood "figured out." In contrast, in the third part of the chapter, I look at how some of the participants are more ambivalent in their approaches to dealing with motherhood. These participants also use how they dress, look, act, and show off their babies to help them transition to motherhood; however, they are less concerned with their appearances and behaviors, and how others see them.

Next, I examine how the notion of tension results from either control or ambivalence happening in an unanticipated way. For example, the participants who attempt to control situations as mothers sometimes find out that they cannot do so and the result is a feeling of tension about their experiences of motherhood. On the other hand, some participants also find out that the “temporary” nature of the new motherhood phase is not as temporary as they initially thought, and this realization causes tension around their feelings about motherhood.

I conclude the chapter by discussing the resulting identity of women once they have transitioned into motherhood. I do this by addressing the ways that control, ambivalence, and tension impact a new mother’s identity, especially via appearance and consumption. I also examine how the emergent thematic interpretation addresses the two key questions posed by the study’s conceptual framework: *What is it like to become a mother?* And *what is the role of appearance within this experience?*

Sudden Transformation

Some may think that the transition to motherhood is gradual; beginning at conception and ending once the baby is born. Given the experiences of participants in this study, however, it is apparent that the transition to motherhood is more of a sudden transformation, at least in terms of how participants view their experiences. While most participants had nine months to get used to the idea of becoming a mother, the majority of them still view the experience of having the child as earth shattering and life changing. For example, Christina described her transition to motherhood as a “dizzying combination of ongoing emotions, from being elated, joyful, thankful, exhausted,

stressed, and delirious, to hormonal, challenged, and pushed to the limit,” while Brianna stated that becoming a mother “turned my world upside down.” These statements seem to sum up how many of the participants in the study feel about their transitions to motherhood.

There are several reasons why new mothers may feel this intense transformation upon having a child. One of the most challenging things that occurs after having a child is an immediate and ongoing lack of sleep. Every single participant in the study mentioned this as the hardest part of becoming a mother. Infants are notoriously awful sleepers and keep non-traditional hours, with many sleeping during the day and waking up several times at night, sometimes staying up for hours each time. This major change in sleep patterns can be detrimental to a new mother’s mental state and psychological well-being, and unfortunately, unless the new mother has people helping her with the child, she has to endure this change in lifestyle alone.

Another factor that may result in a new mother feeling as though a sudden transformation has occurred is that her autonomy is gone. No longer can she simply grab her purse and head out the door. She now has another person to take care of, all the time. In a focus group, when asked about the worst parts of motherhood, Andrea states “The worst part would probably be the extreme need for selflessness.” Teresa chimed in saying, “I can’t just jump in the car and go somewhere anymore,” and Brianna explained, “This person depends on me for everything!” The loss of autonomy that participants experienced is an especially difficult part of the sudden transformation to motherhood.

Smith (1999), Nicholson (1999), and Lewis and Nicholson (1998) all discussed loss of autonomy as being an important part of the postpartum experience; however, they also mentioned that many women going through the postpartum period did not like to discuss feelings of loss. Participants in this dissertation however, seemed to be fairly open with talking about losses and how they try to accept them. For example, when talking about going through postpartum depression, Keri says “I had a really hard time about six weeks in. It just kind of sneaks up on you.” Likewise, Lane discussed her experience with loss of autonomy.

Lane: Losing the...I guess the changes. Just losing, like it's not you anymore. You always have an attachment now and you're that person's, you know, lifeline and it's just hard to adjust to that. And your whole life just changes and flips upside down. Just adjusting to that was probably the worst part for me. Also you're not your normal self anymore, and handling the changes without sleep is even harder.

Even though Lane can no longer do things solely for or by herself, and admits to how difficult that is, she feels comfortable talking about it. Those participants who experienced complications with their pregnancies or births also seemed to have a more difficult time adjusting to motherhood.

Christina and Brianna experienced complications at the end of their pregnancies. Brianna also experienced a difficult birthing process, while Christina had a c-section. Both of these participants described having difficulty adjusting to the postpartum period, partly because of these complications. Christina's baby was taken to a Natal Intensive Care Unit immediately upon being born. When asked about how she felt after delivering her baby, she said, “I of course felt love, but our situation was so stressful that I

immediately began worrying. I wasn't really afforded the opportunity to bask in the glow of new motherhood." This participant spent a month visiting her daughter in the NICU, and therefore some of the difficulty adjusting to motherhood was due to this experience. In a similar vein, Brianna found herself in labor for many hours, to eventually discover that she would have to have an emergency c-section. When discussing this she said, "I was not planning on having a c-section. It was completely unexpected. So I went in with a completely different mindset." Reflecting upon the experience further, she said, "The recovery was just a lot longer and harder than I thought. It was like three days before I could get out of bed. And I think that threw me off." Both Christina and Brianna also found that they had a more difficult time losing pregnancy weight and being satisfied with their postpartum bodies.

Participants frequently mentioned how the changes in their bodies have affected how they view their identities as new mothers. While some view pregnancy as a great time to relax their concerns about body ideals, they have since found that once becoming a mother, it is harder to keep those ideals from surfacing again. Some participants feel that because a woman's body is supposed to get larger during pregnancy, there is less pressure to achieve certain body ideals (i.e. stay trim and thin). However, once they had the baby, many found that those ideals are still there. For example, Christina said, "It was kind of a great excuse to not worry about my weight. And when you start showing that you're pregnant, it's like there's a legitimate reason that you're getting bigger." Likewise, as Brianna said, "I kind of enjoyed being pregnant because as a fitness instructor, or part time one, it was nice not to have to feel in shape." However, her

response regarding her postpartum body satisfaction was quite different, as she stated, “I guess I thought I would just lose the weight and when I didn’t, I went from being really happy about my body to really sad.” These experiences are indicative of the findings of existing postpartum research. Clark, Skouteris, Wertheim, Paxton and Milgrom (2009) and Gjerdingen, Fontaine, Crow, McGovern, Center, and Miner (2009) found that body dissatisfaction in late pregnancy is related to postpartum body dissatisfaction, and while this may be true for some new mothers, in the case of some of the participants in this dissertation, those who seemed to be satisfied with their bodies in late pregnancy were dissatisfied in the postpartum period, perhaps more so than those participants who were dissatisfied in late pregnancy.

Changes in body shape and weight are often used as reference points during the transition to motherhood. For example, after feeling fairly positive about her body size during pregnancy, Lane discusses how she felt after having her baby:

Lane: I thought I would be back to my normal size after having her. But I was still in maternity pants for like a month! I looked like I was five months pregnant for a while after having her. Nobody tells you that part!

In the same vein, many participants were critical of their postpartum bodies and referred to the pre-baby body as their “normal” body, suggesting a strong desire to achieve that look once again. For example, Becky discussed how excited she was when someone mentioned that she looked good for having just had a baby, because she herself did not feel very good.

Becky: I still have weight to lose and none of my clothes fit right, but I was so excited today when a lady at Target said that she'd never guess I had a baby in March. Granted, I was wearing a loose jacket, but still!

Even when receiving a compliment, Becky found it hard to accept because she does not feel the same about her body as she did before the baby.

In terms of specific bodily changes, breast size surfaced as the most frequently talked about body change among participants. Clark et al. (2009) and Gjerdingen et al. (2009) found that non-breastfeeding status was a predictor of postpartum body dissatisfaction; however findings of this dissertation suggest that participants who breastfeed are often more dissatisfied with their bodies than those who do not, specifically due to the increase in breast size. Interestingly, the two participants who did not choose to breastfeed seemed to experience the least overall body dissatisfaction. In fact, one of the participants in this dissertation who did not choose to breastfeed chose not to do so to avoid body dissatisfaction issues, in that she did not want her breast size and shape to change. Moreover participants often discussed breastfeeding in terms of how difficult it is to wear the same shirts and dresses that they had been able to wear in the past. Keri, for example, remarked that "It's like that's all there is to me now. They're everywhere!," and finds it difficult to find shirts to wear that are conducive to breastfeeding and that she can even fit into given that her chest size has increased so much since becoming a mother.

For participants, changes in appearance do not seem to be limited to the physical body. Changes in beauty routines, and thus outward appearances, were also mentioned as major lifestyle shifts for participants. It is apparent that some participants feel like

different people once becoming mothers because they no longer have the time to spend on their pre-baby beauty routines. Instead participants most often find themselves wearing casual clothing, no makeup, and putting their hair in ponytails. Layla, for example, stated that before she had the baby, she would “never have left the house the way I leave the house now.” Because of these changes in appearance, participants often find it hard to recognize their physical selves, thereby making it even harder to recognize their new postpartum identities. Abby offers a good example of this by saying,

Abby: I miss my clothes. It was fun to wear stuff that made me feel attractive. I liked getting attention and I felt good about myself. Now, I feel kind of boring, how I dress, but I’m at home and he grabs at everything, so I can’t wear shirts that are low-cut. And I’m on the floor all the time, and can’t wear short skirts or dresses anymore either.

Because she experienced becoming a mother as a sudden transformation, it is likely that the resulting identity is taking longer to establish and recognize, than if the transition to motherhood were a more gradual process. Looking at how this transformation affects the new mother’s lifestyle and resulting identity helps to explain how she begins to portray the role of mother to herself and to others.

When a woman becomes a mother, she may feel the need to portray the role of mother by either acting or dressing a certain way. As Stone (1962) suggests, critical turning points in life are often marked by a change in how one dresses. Findings from this dissertation suggest that, as a whole, the “uniform” for a new mother consists of a nursing bra, tank top, yoga pants, a loose cardigan, and a nursing cover. If dress serves as a communication tool during social interactions (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992), then a

new mother may wear these items to convince others that she is a “legitimate” mother and ultimately to convince herself of this.

Bailey (1999) states that mothers in the postpartum period experience a change in clothing, not only in terms of size, but in terms of style. Findings of this dissertation align with this notion and suggest that one of the main reasons for the change in style during the postpartum period is because the clothing that reflects a new mother’s identity cannot be worn, due to comfort and function. For example, Keri talks about how she wears workout clothes all day so that it makes exercising easier.

Keri: But the truth is, if you want to work out, you have to wear workout clothes all the time. I don’t have time to change into those clothes and then out of them once I leave the gym. I used to wonder why stay-at-home-moms always wore workout stuff but now I know they have to. It doesn’t make sense not to, if you plan on exercising.

Although the workout clothing is comfortable and allows her to exercise whenever she is able, as she also says, “I feel more normal in my old clothes. More like myself. I just can’t wear them yet.” In this case, there is a desire to wear clothing that expresses the participant’s identity, but not the ability to do so. Thus, in terms of identity, there seems to be a gap between her actual self and ideal self, or who she feels she is, and who she is able to dress to be. Thus, this finding highlights the extent to which a woman’s style may not change simply because she becomes a mother, but because she physically cannot wear the clothing that she thinks reflects her “true” identity.

Garments worn by new mothers, such as nursing bras, nursing tops, nursing covers, and yoga pants, were often mentioned as primary staples in participants’

wardrobes. If such clothing does not necessarily reflect the participants' identities, then it may be instead considered "costumes" (Goffman, 1959). In other words, participants may feel that they should wear these garments in order to help them portray the role of mother. "Performance" is a term used by Goffman (1959) to explain how face-to-face encounters can be viewed as theatrical performances. Findings from this dissertation suggest that participants tend to either attempt to control the performance of being a mother or are more ambivalent about the role. Participants who use control as a means to help them sort through the transition usually had well-defined images of what the "being a mother" performance should look like. The extent to which some participants sought to manage their motherhood performances is the subject of the next section.

Control

One way that a new mother may attempt to understand her transition to motherhood is through the use of control. Having power over certain aspects of her life may make her feel as though she can handle this new experience/role in a better way. Control may show itself in terms of how the new mother dresses, her overall appearance, how she acts, how and what she buys, and how she shows her child to the world. A participant who uses control as a means to help her navigate the experience of becoming a mother does so by controlling her performance of "mother" (Goffman, 1959). She controls this performance through impression management specifically regarding her appearance. In this section, the ways that participants use exercise as a means of control are examined, as are the ways in which clothing and other appearance-related products are consumed.

Exercise and the Body

“Impression management” is a term used to describe how we try to present ourselves to others so that they will see us in the way that we want them to (Goffman, 1959). Managing this impression involves selection of attire, and language, use of manners, body posture, along with many other considerations. In this dissertation, impression management is seen to play out in several ways. One of the most obvious ways that impression management, via control, is used by participants is through physical exercise. By participating in fitness activities, participants attempt to control their bodies (with which they are often unhappy), their schedules, and their emotions. Participants who mentioned exercise usually did so either in the context of discussing their unhappiness with their current body shapes and sizes, as something that helps them feel more like themselves, or as something that helps them feel better emotionally. Diedre, for instance, said that for her, “Exercise is like medicine.” For many participants, exercise is also a way to help them achieve the ideal self.

Devine, Bove, and Olsen (2000) found that if a woman is healthy and satisfied with her body before getting pregnant, she will likely remain so during the postpartum period and vice versa. Based on participant’s feelings about body dissatisfaction in the present study, this notion seems to hold true. Findings of this dissertation indicate that those who were unhappy about their postpartum bodies were usually unhappy with their body sizes before becoming pregnant. As mentioned previously, Christina and Brianna are two participants who enjoyed being pregnant because it allowed to them have a

reason to look larger, but immediately upon having their babies, found that their body dissatisfaction increased again.

Clothing and Costumes

Controlling the transition to motherhood through physical exercise is clearly aided by the use of clothing. For example, as previously mentioned, Keri constantly wears workout clothing in case she happens to find time to exercise. Therefore, clothing is another important factor in impression management and in controlling the transition to motherhood.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, one way that a new mother may exhibit control is through her appearance, in terms of how she is dressed, whether she wears makeup, fixes her hair, and how “put-together” she looks. Some participants think that they feel more in control and better equipped to handle motherhood when they are dressed nicely, wear makeup, and style their hair. A new mother may also use her child’s appearance as a means of control. That is, some participants feel better (about motherhood in general) when their children look cute or fashionable and attract positive attention from others when they are out in public. Although there may be a difference between how these participants look when at home versus when out in public, those who use control as a means of navigating the motherhood experience typically try to look “decent” while in both the private and public spheres.

Specifically of interest to this study are the ways that participants adapt dress for various social settings. For example, Lily is a member of a bookclub that consists of other new mothers. When discussing how she feels about her appearance when attending

these meetings, she says, “With my friends, I think they look put-together, so I think ‘I can do it too!’” Lily tries harder to control her appearance and look put-together when around this particular group. Another example of using clothing as a means of control among participants is Teresa’s appearance at work. She says, “At my job, your appearance is as important as your ability to do work. I’m not saying it should be that way. It just is.” Consequently, Teresa strives to look competent and put-together when at work so that others will think this way about her. Thus, findings suggest that impression management is a very useful tool for controlling how a new mother thinks about her abilities as a mother, as well as how she thinks others view these abilities.

If it is indeed true that a woman “performs” the role of mother, then it is probably also true that her social interactions are based on this performance. That is, she may dress and use specific items that help her to feel like a mother when she is going to be engaging and interacting with others. This notion coincides with findings of a study by Cody (2012), which suggest that some consumption during liminal periods (such as the transition to motherhood) can be fruitful. For example, Abby liked to dress a bit flashy before having her baby, but once she saw other new mothers within her social circle dressing more conservatively, she did the same. An example of Cooley’s (1902) notion of the looking-glass self, wherein an individual uses others to view herself, dressing like others helps Abby to play the part of “mother” in a more convincing and effective way. New mothers who use control during their transitions to motherhood may do so in order to appear like “good” mothers. If these women are concerned with how they appear to others, especially in that they want others to view them as “good” mothers, then they may

act on assumptions of how they think others view them. For example, as Andrea stated, “Everyone’s always looking at me because I have a new baby. I can’t go anywhere without everyone coming up to asking about the baby. So because of the extra attention I pay more attention to how I look too.”

Likewise, it seems that the more that a new mother spends time with other new mothers, the more she understands her situation and is better able to acquire socially understood meanings through interaction. Going to activities like playdates (which are really for the mothers to talk about their newborn babies) and Mommy and Me classes place the new mother in an environment where she is surrounded by others who are like her. The more that she is around other mothers, the more she learns about mothering, and therefore the more information she has at her disposal to use when shaping her performance as a mother.

An important consideration that emerged from the data is that when participants seek to make others see them a certain way, it requires that these others affirm who participants want them to think they are. In other words, participants rely on other people to not just affirm their performances in the role as a mother, but to do so in ways that the participants expect them to. This process is part of impression management, in that portraying or managing an impression is not necessary or fruitful unless someone else confirms that impression. This is generally not a problem, in that if a woman looks and acts like a mother, others will probably view her this way and treat her as such. The interesting facet of this, however, is that babies are often the ones who are interacting with new mothers, and rarely do they provide an understandable means of confirming an

impression. Thus, this study then adds an important element to the discussion of impression management, specifically one that questions how new mothers are supposed to act when the “other” (i.e. the baby) is the one providing that confirmation.

Unfortunately for parents, babies often decide not to “play the part” when in front of others; however, participants who are effective at using control to understand the experience of becoming a mother seem more likely to understand the “definition of the situation” (Thomas, 1928). As discussed in Chapter II, the definition of the situation is a symbolic interactionism term that describes the context within which certain things occur (Thomas, 1928). It is what is used to help people know what is expected of them or how to behave. In the example of motherhood, there are numerous situations to be defined. For instance, while people are visiting a new mother’s home, she might use the definition of the situation to understand and acknowledge that while they are there she is expected to remain calm and seem happy about her new role as a mother. Similarly, appearing “put-together” and calm when in public with the baby could also be another example of the definition of the situation.

Participants who understand how they are expected to behave in given situations seem more likely to use control as a means of dealing with the transition to motherhood. For example, Catherine mentioned that when her mother visits, she dresses her son in nicer outfits than he usually wears, because her mother is very particular about what she likes to see her grandson wearing. She states, “Yeah, she is more picky about his clothes so I try to put something besides a onesie on him when she visits.” In this example, Catherine uses the baby’s clothing as a means to control the situation, which she has

defined as potentially stressful, given that her mother cares more about how her baby looks than she does as his mother. Another example of predicting and defining a situation occurs when a participant leaves home with her baby.

Lily: I don't really feel comfortable going into a store and going into the dressing room and feeding quite yet. I know that after a certain point I'm probably going to be like "I don't care" and we're just going to have to do this but we're not going far far away right now, so it's pretty easy for me to get back home in enough time.

In this example, Lily was able to predict that she may become stressed about feeding her baby when in public, therefore she sought to control the situation by not going far from home. Because Lily realizes that she only had a very short time frame to go shopping with her child before the baby would need to be fed again, she schedules her outings around this schedule, and close to home, in order to prevent the baby from crying. This example illustrates how Lily defines the situation by viewing it as an occurrence that may prove to be stressful, and acting based on this definition. In essence, she is anxious about her performance with the baby when in public, and therefore tries to stay close to home in order to not have to try to "act" like she is in control when out with the baby.

Although many participants mentioned wearing casual clothing at home, many also suggested that they may wear slightly "dressier" casual clothing when in public. For example, when talking about yoga pants, Jessica said "I've got my dressy yoga pants to wear when I go out. They aren't as old or gross as the other ones." Bethany mentioned feeling more "put-together" when in public because of her diaper bag.

Bethany: Yes! I spent a ton of time looking for the right diaper bag! I liked this one because it's not too girly, so my husband can use it and not feel weird, but it also goes with everything. I didn't want an ugly, typical diaper bag. I guess it makes me feel more stylish when I wear this one.

Bethany's example shows how something as simple as a diaper bag purchase can make a new mother feel confident and attractive. In this example, Bethany imagined that she may need appearance-related products to help her feel more stylish (i.e., she defined the situation as being in public and not feeling stylish), and spent time finding a diaper bag that would help her feel stylish.

Consumption and Clothing

Existing research on motherhood and consumption suggests that mothers will consume certain products to feel like they are being "good mothers" (Prothero, 2002; Theodorou & Spyrou, 2013; The Voice Group, 2010); however, in the current study, this did not seem to be the case. In fact, many participants stressed the importance of not spending money on postpartum clothing and dressing the baby in hand-me-downs. Brianna said, "I'm not going to spend money on a new wardrobe!" Similarly, Catherine stated, "I get a lot of his stuff on Craigslist." Rather, it seems that participants feel that being a "good mother" means participating in certain practices, such as breastfeeding, or attending mother and baby groups. Carly, for example, said, "I really wanted to breastfeed because I feel like that's what you should do, but I just couldn't."

Although consuming to become a "good mother" may not have been practiced by the participants in this study, many appear to use consumption as a means of control during the transition to motherhood. As Carrigan and Szmigin (2004) found, most

women realize that their shopping behaviors will be different upon becoming mothers. Findings of this dissertation expand on this research, and suggest that the propensity to use the Internet as an information search tool increases when a woman becomes a new mother, however many still enjoy physically shopping at a store in order to get out of the house with the baby. Shopping for must-have items like groceries is often done alone or very quickly, but many participants discussed the enjoyment of taking their babies shopping when they are napping, just to look around. Whether it is a change in information search, or the pace by which they shop (fast and alone or browsing while the baby sleeps), participants found that their shopping behaviors did change once they became mothers, in both enjoyable as well as stressful ways.

Although participants did not seem to want to spend money on new clothing, an important part of feeling like a mother seems to involve purchasing new types of products. That is, nothing makes a new mother feel like she has been inducted into the motherhood club like purchasing diapers, wipes, formula, and baby lotion all together. To sum it up, Emma says, “I buy everything at Target. Of course I look like a mom. My shopping cart is filled with diapers and baby food.”

Participants use different techniques to attempt to integrate the new role of mother into their identities. For some, it is by dressing more conservatively, dressing the child more formally when company visits, or scheduling shopping trips down to the minute. These participants want to be prepared and feel in control of their mothering abilities. By doing so, they feel more confident as mothers, and thus incorporate this confidence into their new identities. However, as will be discussed in the next section, not all participants

used control as a means to navigate the unfamiliar waters of motherhood. Instead, these participants try to be more relaxed and flexible in their approaches to the transition.

Ambivalence

While some participants may try to control the experience of new motherhood, others seem to view the experience as temporary, thereby affording them a more ambivalent attitude toward the experience. However, whether participants use control as a means to understand the experience of becoming a mother or take a more relaxed approach to transitioning to motherhood, appearance plays a major role. Whereas the participants who use control to navigate their experiences may attempt to look put-together when outside the home, those who seem more ambivalent often mentioned not caring too much about what others think of their appearances when outside the home. As Deidre describes her beauty routine, she says “I have no time for it, so I don’t worry about doing it. I wasn’t very into appearances to begin with, so it’s nice to have an excuse now.”

This section of the chapter consists of two main parts. The first focuses on the lack of concern that participants feel regarding losing pregnancy weight quickly, and in turn, how they enjoy wearing casual, larger, and more comfortable clothing during the postpartum period. The second part centers on participants’ support systems and highlights the way that some participants who seem more ambivalent about their motherhood experiences rely more on family than outside influences during the postpartum period.

The Body and Clothing

The ambivalence expressed by the participants focuses mostly on the body, which, in turn, seems to lead to ambivalence concerning dress and other aspects of appearance. Participants who are not as concerned with exercise or losing baby-weight quickly seem to view their body size and shape as a temporary state, thinking that eventually the weight will come off and they will resume their “normal” looks. Because of this thought process, these participants often do not mind wearing clothing that is larger than their normal sizes, and more casual than they are used to wearing. In fact, some mention really enjoying wearing the casual style of clothing. For example, Stella said “I could wear yoga pants, a hoodie, nursing tank, and Ugg slippers everyday now. Actually that is what I wear whenever I can.”

When asked if they have purchased any clothing specifically for the transition from just having the baby to pre-baby weight, some participants mentioned that because this was a temporary stage, they were not going to buy new clothing. Brianna said “I can’t fit into anything I have and I’m not going to go out and buy all new sizes for me.” Jessica did not want to spend money on new clothing for the transition to motherhood either, however she did mention investing in “professional loungewear” to wear while her baby was in the hospital. Gregson and Beale (2004) suggest that women put their identity on hold during pregnancy by investing little symbolic meaning in their clothing. Based on participant’s views of the temporary nature of early postpartum clothing, the same could be said for this period in a woman’s life. However, an important extension of this finding is that often the reason that many of the participants in the study do not want

to purchase new clothing is because they are also on a budget, given that many participants decided to stay home with their baby and therefore the household is down to only one income. Thus, even if these participants may want to dress in clothing that reflects their “true” identities, they cannot due to financial restraints. It does appear, however, that there is less of a disconnect between the actual and ideal self for those participants, like Catherine, Jessica, and Layla, who are more ambivalent towards their clothing than for those who use clothing as a means of controlling the experience.

Teams

Ambivalence also plays out in how the participants want others to view how their babies are dressed. Some participants very much want others to see their babies as cute, while others are more concerned with the ease and comfort of the child’s clothing. Catherine, for example, said, “He pretty much just wears onesies.” Jessica, too, describes how comfort and convenience win out over cuteness.

Jessica: I thought I’d be more into dressing her up in cute little girls’ clothes, but actually she just wears onesies all the time. It’s just easier and she’s more comfortable. Trying to get dresses, especially the ones that button down the back, on her is just too hard. And she hates headbands. She just keeps pulling them off.

The participants who are not as concerned with how their babies look have a more flexible attitude when it comes to how others view their children. They also do not seem to care as much about what others think of them or their own appearances.

In terms of support systems, or what Goffman (1959) refers to as “teams,” this study found that the more ambivalent participants tend to rely on family for support and help with their babies more so than other mothers that they might meet at Mommy and

Me classes, for example. These participants almost seem to have put their “outside” lives on hold, as they view the time with their infants as temporary, and have become very home-centric. Another interesting finding is that participants who are less concerned about their looks and how others view them do not seem to be concerned with what their spouses think of their appearances, either. Ogle, Tyner, and Schofield-Tomschin (2011) suggest that women use their husbands as looking-glasses during the postpartum period. However, participants in this dissertation mention their husbands as someone from whom they request opinions but do not seem to be overly concerned with *how* their husbands view them. For example, Layla said that she asks her husband how she looks, and describes the experience by saying, “I’ll ask him how I look, but I don’t really know why. He’ll barely look up and say, ‘Yeah, you look good.’ It’s pretty useless actually.” Layla, who seems to be mostly ambivalent toward clothing and her appearance in the postpartum period, suggests here that because she does not get a straightforward answer from her husband, it is not really worth asking his opinion in the first place. Thus, spouses were not generally used by the participants in this study as looking glasses.

In addition to participants not being concerned with how their husbands view them, they are also very unconcerned about the effect that celebrities have on how they see themselves as mothers. Some research suggests that exposure to celebrities has an impact on body satisfaction during pregnancy and post-pregnancy (Champion & Furnham, 1999; Martin & Kennedy, 1993; Slevec & Tiggemann, 2011; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Findings from the data collected for this dissertation seem to suggest the opposite.

It may sound as though the participants who are less concerned about how others view them would have an easier transition to motherhood than those participants who are trying to control the experience. However, there is a point where a new mother is faced with acknowledging the differences in the self and identity brought on by motherhood. Just because a new mother tries to control the experience of transitioning to motherhood does not mean that she will always succeed. Sometimes people do not act as predicted, thereby disrupting the role that the individual seeks to play. The new mother who tries to control everything may also find that it is too tiring to do so, and inevitably tension arises. The same can be said for the more ambivalent mothers. It is nice to think that it is possible to transition to motherhood in a seamless and carefree manner, but the data indicate that this is rare, and at some point, even the most ambivalent mothers will experience conflict and tension during the transition to motherhood.

Tension

Some participants alluded to the fact that women can “do pregnancy” fashionably. For example, Teresa discussed her fondness for maternity clothing, by saying, “I could pretty much wear any big shirt and put a belt on and it looked cute.” Melinda, too, enjoyed dressing during pregnancy.

Melinda: Because when I was pregnant I had all these clothes that people had sent me, all these um Indian tops and they had just gotten them in large because they’re kind of cut loose anyhow and so until the last month or so I could use those, so I had this like 40 different embroidered things in all these different delicate fabrics and flowers and I’d just wear them with black maternity pants and some jewelry or something and so I felt like I looked put together all the time.

While dressing fashionably during pregnancy seemed to be fairly easy, there is little guidance as to how to do this in the postpartum stage. This lack of guidance was found to be one of the reasons that the new mothers in this study experience appearance-related tension during the transition. Because there is no “standard” in terms of how to look fashionable in the postpartum period to strive for, new mothers do not know how to dress, or for that matter, how they should appear to the world as new mothers.

In addition to experiencing difficulty in terms of not knowing how to dress during the postpartum period, findings from this study suggest that when participants feel out of control or realize that, indeed, this experience of being a mother is not a temporary state of being, tension ensues. When those participants who use control as a mechanism to understand their experiences of becoming a mother feel as though they are out of control in a certain situation, they tend to become frustrated and conflicted about their feelings concerning motherhood. For instance, Lily gave an example about how she responds when her child starts crying in a store, (“I kind of start panicking.”). Lily wants everyone around her to think that she is in control, but when her baby starts crying, it makes her feel as though she is losing that control. Again while some participants are more ambivalent about controlling the experience of motherhood, when they realize that it is not in fact a temporary state and that they will never return to their “old” selves, panic seems to set in, and they too feel conflicted about the role of mother.

To fully explore the scope of the tension that participants seem to experience, this section is divided into six parts. The first centers on the conflict between front and back stage behavior and how this provides a nexus for tension for both participants who try to

control their motherhood experience, and those who are more ambivalent about it. The second part explores the idea that new mothers no longer have control over their time. Relatedly, the third part has to do with the shift in consumption focus from the self to the baby. Fourth, an examination of the ways participants deal with social interactions and conveying an image to others that they desire, is presented. Last, avoiding identity as a mother, as well as the disconnect between the actual and ideal selves is discussed.

“All the World’s a Stage” – Shakespeare

An important theoretical consideration when discussing participants’ experiences with motherhood is that of “front and back stage behavior” (Goffman, 1959). This is a dramaturgical notion that Goffman used to describe how a person portrays a role (or puts on a performance) in public and in private. Front stage behavior is what an individual does in the presence of others. It is how others know that individual. Back stage behavior describes more of the individual’s private behaviors, such as how he or she acts or looks at home with no one around. As a whole, during the postpartum period, participants’ behavior and dress would be considered mostly “back stage,” in that they are typically dressed more casually (i.e. wearing “at home” clothing), and act the same way at home that they do in public (ex. feeding their baby, tired, etc.). In fact, it could be said that their back stage and front stage behaviors, including dress, become blurred.

The data suggest that participants who attempt to control the experience of motherhood typically exhibit more defined front stage behavior than those participants who do not try to control the experience. An example of this is Lynn, who described her attempt at looking better when in public than when at home. When talking about how

she dislikes the way she dresses now, she says “At least I wear my nice yoga pants when I go out!” Indeed, when participants who use control as a mechanism to help understand their experiences with motherhood venture out of the house they strive to look put-together; however, when at home, they may not care as much. Melinda, for example, cares a great deal about what she looks like in public, but when at home, it is the opposite:

Melinda: I have these maternity yoga pants that are just like, it’s like wearing pajamas, but they look sort of like pants. I’m in my own house, so I guess it doesn’t matter what I wear as long as I’m comfortable.

Interestingly, those with a more ambivalent attitude seemed to most obviously blur the lines between front and back stage behavior. These mothers typically mention looking the same, no matter where they are, and not caring too much about what people think, whether they are at home or in public. This is a key finding because it expands on Goffman’s (1959) notion that front stage and back stage behavior are defined. This finding suggests that during the transition to motherhood, even if a new mother tries to better define her front stage and back stage behavior and appearance, the separation between stages is nevertheless blurred. There could be many reasons as to why this occurs, including that some instances are so intense (e.g., the transition to motherhood) that the performer does not care whether the audience sees him or her backstage versus front stage. As the interpretation of data has shown, becoming a mother is an incredibly life-altering event, and one that appears to foster a situation wherein front and back stage behavior blend simply out of necessity. Moreover, findings seem to suggest that perhaps

front stage and back stage behavior should not be viewed necessarily as a dichotomy, but as a continuum. Participants who attempt to control their appearance and/or behaviors when in public, alluded to doing so in ways that are much less defined than they were before they became mothers. As mentioned before, Lynn would put on her “nice” yoga pants, but they are still yoga pants. This hints at the use of clothing to establish a more fluid conception of front and back stage behaviors, rather than a distinct separation of the two.

Managing front and back stage behaviors can be a source of tension, especially for those mothers who try to control their situations. If backstage behaviors or appearances are made front stage, then embarrassment and shame can occur (Goffman, 1959). Deciphering front and back stage behaviors and appearance however, is not the only source of tension for participants.

Out of Time and Out of Control

A common example of how participants feel out of control during the transition to motherhood that emerged from the interpretation is the overwhelming feeling they experience when they realize that things that were once easy to keep up with (such as laundry, cleaning, showering) are now almost impossible to accomplish. Smith (1999), Nicholson (1999), and Lewis and Nicholson (1998) conducted studies that addressed the losses that mothers face during the postpartum period. Some of these losses were those of autonomy, identity, time, and friends. Findings of this dissertation support these ideas, particularly the extent to which the loss of autonomy is a major challenge for new mothers not only to deal with, but to incorporate into their identities. That is, having to

always consider another person in every decision is a completely new experience for participants, and one that inevitably takes time getting used to. Further, this dissertation expands on existing studies, in that in addition to a loss of time, participants also clearly experience feeling a lack of control over time. That is, while many participants experience less time than they once had to complete certain tasks, it is also the lack of control over time that is difficult to get used to. For example, Layla describes her frustration with a typical day:

Layla: By the time I sit down it's 8, 9 o'clock and I'm like "Oh my gosh, I gotta go to bed 'cause we're gonna be getting up soon." Well, there's another day of not getting anything around here done! I just feel like I can't win. When I finally have a minute to myself to get things done, all I want to do is lay on the couch and read or watch TV.

Due to a baby's unpredictable schedule, a new mother never really knows when it will sleep, be hungry, or be fussy. Even if the new mother finds that she has time to do something for herself, it may very well be interrupted without warning by the baby. This lack of control over time can be frustrating for new mothers and can make them feel like they do not have very much time, but even more frustrating, that they do not have any control over the time they do have.

When It's "We," Not "Me"

The loss of time and lack of control over it is important for understanding the transition to motherhood in another way: women are limited in the ability to explore their identities as new mothers. Interestingly, while consumption was found to be related to time and used as a means of controlling the experience of becoming a mother, it is also

a major source of tension for some, especially in terms of having to purchase products they do not necessarily want and products that are not solely for them.

As the literature suggests, consumption plays a major role in how an individual views his or her identity (Belk, 1988; Cook, 2008; Mehta & Belk, 1991). However, consumption is most often discussed in terms of how it helps to resolve identity issues. Based on this study, for new mothers, this may not be the case. In fact, participants in this study frequently mentioned consumption of postpartum appearance-related products as frustrating and in direct contradiction to how they thought products should reflect their identities. For example, Lily describes shopping for nursing bras as “miserable,” while Brianna stated that her closet was “not a happy place,” because she can no longer fit into any of her pre-pregnancy clothing. However, she also does not want to spend money on a new wardrobe due to her larger size.

Although Cody’s (2012) study on consumption during liminal periods found that consumption can be fruitful, it also suggests that sometimes consumption during transitional times can be frustrating. Participants in this dissertation seem to have a very difficult, if not hostile relationship with appearance-related products in particular. Clothing, such as nursing bras, tanks, and yoga pants, are deemed necessary to function as a new mother, but are not necessarily enjoyed by participants and therefore cause immense frustration. In addition to clothing, objects such as breast pumps are also associated with negative feelings and meanings for the new mother, who is often tired of using and cleaning it over and over. This finding builds on academic literature discussed in Chapter II that suggests that during unsettled times, objects can become highly charged

with meaning (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Thomsen & Sorensen, 2006). Based on the participants' experiences, some of the objects that new mothers have to use frequently can become highly charged with negative meanings and can affect a new mother's identity in a similarly negative way, including causing feelings of frustration.

Perhaps one of the reasons that consumption of clothing and appearance-related products is frustrating during the postpartum period is because the new mother is not purchasing or wearing clothing solely for her. She is wearing or using these items (ex. nursing bra, yoga pants, nursing cover, breast pump) specifically to connect with her baby. Thus, consumption is not enjoyable because it is not for the self alone. This finding seems particularly true for mothers who feel pressure to conform to appearance-related norms and place a greater measure of importance on what others think of them.

Social Interactions

Social interactions, with the baby and others, are probably the most critical to understanding why conflict and tension often result from the use of consumption to control the motherhood experience. A baby crying inconsolably in a store during a shopping trip, or spitting up in public are examples of things not going as planned. In other words, the actors in the performance are not engaging in their ascribed scripts (Goffman, 1959). In most cases, the person who is not following the script is the baby. This brings up the notion of impression management, or how a new mother portrays the role of mother when in public. It is challenging for her, if her fellow actor (i.e. the baby) does not act like it is "supposed to." Considering what this disconnect between actors and roles means for performance has not been fully explored in the academic literature

and would be a valuable contribution to the areas of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy. The participant who prefers that the performance occurs a certain way is often faced with a reality that is different from what is imagined, again, especially when the baby is involved. When this disconnect happens the participant may feel lost, and especially in terms of her identity. If she views herself (or thinks that others view her) as a mother who is in control of her role, self, and child, and then something happens to mess that up, the participant is left wondering who she is, as she is no longer someone who is in control.

Other social interactions that seem to create conflict in the new mother who uses control to understand the transition to motherhood usually involve other new mothers. Through social interaction with others, a new mother's identity is established and maintained (Stone, 1962), and because a new mother typically does not view her postpartum appearance (or view how she thinks others see her) in a positive light, this identity can include feelings of inadequacy, unattractiveness, and frustration. As a result, the ways that a new mother behaves (i.e. dresses), can therefore be scripted through interactions with other new mothers. In fact, attending Mommy and Me classes is probably one of the most common (and current) ways that participants act out the role of mother. New mothers often seek out and gravitate toward other new mothers because this group of people is experiencing a similar lifestyle change and shares common interests. In fact, based on participants' experiences, other mothers appear to be the greatest source of influence for new mothers. For example, Keri lives far away from her family, but finds support at her gym and at Mommy and Me type groups, where she is

among other mothers. However, it is important to note that, while many participants find themselves using other mothers as looking-glasses (Cooley, 1902), as Layla explains, the way they think others view them may not necessarily change how they actually dress

Layla: Some of those women are so put-together. They're in like full makeup and dressed to the nines and stuff and I'm like "Oh my gosh. How did they do that?" You know? I was glad that I got to use my hair dryer today. So yeah, I try to look put-together, but honestly I care less about my looks than I did before I was pregnant.

In contrast, Andrea said that she often feels as though people want to stop her to see her baby when she is in public, so she tries to look nice for when this situation occurs. She states, "Everyone's always looking at me because I have a new baby. I can't go anywhere without everyone coming up to asking about the baby. So because of the extra attention I pay more attention to how I look too." In this example, Andrea uses her appearance to handle potential interactions when out in public.

I Do Need to Care

Participants who are ambivalent about the transition to motherhood view the postpartum period as temporary, which allows them to worry less about the weight gained during pregnancy, or how they appear to others immediately following the birth of the child. However, at some point, most of these participants also seem to realize that the transition to motherhood is ongoing. The weight gained during pregnancy may not go away, and even if they are comfortable, yoga pants and nursing tanks cannot be worn everywhere. For these participants, a realization generally occurs, as they begin to comprehend that one's identity is not simply put on hold during pregnancy and

immediately following the birth of the child. Instead, one's identity has been developing into something new and shifting in focus. When this realization occurs, these participants are left wondering who they are as new mothers.

One of the most obvious ways that this tension plays out for those participants who are more ambivalent about the need to control the transition to motherhood revolves around how their appearance focus shifts from themselves to their babies. As Diedre said, "It's so much more fun buying for her than for myself." Almost all participants mentioned that they enjoy shopping and purchasing clothing for their babies, but those who were especially unhappy with their own appearances and did not want to spend time on themselves, seemed to enjoy focusing on the appearance of the child the most. For example, Brianna said that her own closet was "not a happy place," but indicated the following about her daughter's closet.

Brianna: I usually change her two or three times a day and we just try clothes on. She always has a headband with her outfit. I really enjoy going into her room and organizing her closet. She has her own little stand with all of her headbands and bows to match each outfit. I'm having a lot more fun with her clothes and her style.

For Brianna, dressing her baby may be a surrogate means of attending to her own appearance. In other words, if Brianna does not know how to address her new identity through appearance, then she can at least use appearance to attempt to establish her baby's identity. By doing so, she is in some ways imparting her identity onto her baby, especially in terms of style and color preferences. This is the case for others, such as

Lane, Christina, and Keri, who all mentioned not wanting to dress their daughters in the color pink, as they themselves do not like that color.

In the case of these participants who are more ambivalent about their own appearances, it is possible that they are using consumption to avoid addressing their own emerging identities as mothers. These participants enjoy purchasing clothing for the baby because it allows them to avoid purchasing clothing for themselves, and to thereby avoid thinking about their own identities. This finding differs from the general notion that consumption is used as a means to explore an identity (Belk, 1988; Cook, 2008), as it suggests that for these participants, consumption is being used as a means of avoidance. Interestingly, Lewis and Nicholson (1998) found that postpartum mothers sometimes feel resentful about their babies receiving the majority of attention; however, findings from this dissertation point to the idea that some new mothers prefer that other people pay attention to their babies, partly because it takes the focus off of them. Also, some feel that if others think their babies are dressed as cute, then it validates that they are doing a “good job” as mothers.

In a similar vein, Freitas, Kaiser, Chandler, Hall, Kim, and Hammidi (1997) found that some consumers use appearance as a means of avoiding a particular identity. While the more ambivalent mothers may use consumption to avoid addressing their new identities, it is challenging to actually accomplish this. That is, most participants find that they cannot avoid wearing certain garments during the immediate postpartum stage. For example, yoga pants were deemed the most comfortable pants to wear after giving birth. Nursing bras, tanks, and covers were used by all breastfeeding participants. The three

participants who did not breastfeed still had to wear tanks and cardigans due to being a larger size than before pregnancy. Thus, findings from this study suggest that it may be difficult to truly avoid using clothing to communicate identity as a new mother during the postpartum period, as the clothing that is typically worn is done so for comfort and functional reasons. Moreover, though new mothers may find it necessary to wear garments associated with motherhood, this study reveals that they often feel as if these garments do not reflect their ideal selves.

Actual vs. Ideal Self

An obvious tension seemed to occur between how participants view their actual selves versus how they view their ideal selves (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). As mentioned earlier, regardless of how participants choose to handle the transition to motherhood, they all want the ideal self to be exactly the same as the pre-baby self. This is an interesting finding, particularly in that no one said that the ideal self was the actual self, and most did not even acknowledge the actual self, again suggesting that they view this stage of new motherhood as temporary and undeveloped. Indeed, as they are going through the transition to motherhood, participants were often so exhausted and overwhelmed that they could not put into words how they felt about their new identities during the interviews. For example, when asked about her ideal self ensemble, Andrea states, “My ideal self is where I used to be.”

Indeed, it was very common for participants to refer to the “old self” or “normal self” when discussing their pre-baby clothing and appearances, and in some ways, it seems that many of the participants in the study are essentially “stuck” in terms of being

able to acknowledge their new identities. As a liminal state, their actual selves are, of course, developing and changing upon becoming mothers, but because they can only relate to and associate themselves with their pre-baby selves, they cannot acknowledge or even recognize the ways that the new actual self may be emerging.

Using others as referents can, and sometimes does, help participants identify their new identities. Based on the interpretation, findings suggest that new mothers are not only concerned with how they appear to themselves, but also how they appear to others. Some may imagine how others view them, thus their self-image becomes based largely on these assumptions (Cooley, 1902). As an example, Diedre said,

Diedre: I'll put on a skirt and nice top when we go see my family, for a party of something. It just makes me feel better to wear something nice, so they don't look at me like I'm a mess.

Diedre feels better when she dresses up around her family because she assumes that they will think she "looks like a mess" if she is not dressed up. Although a new mother's identity is fluid during the postpartum period, as she begins to negotiate her appearance through interactions with others during this stage, she begins to create her new identity as a mother and recognize her role as such.

Resulting Identity

Based on the interpretation of participants' experiences, the identity of a new mother is comprised of a complex combination of feelings, such as control, ambivalence, and the tension that comes from a lack of control or the sudden realization of the impact of the decision to enter into motherhood. In essence, the identity of a new mother is

constantly changing and therefore cannot be summarized simply. Becoming a mother is a life-changing experience that plays itself out in several ways, including in a new mother's consumption and appearance-related behaviors. Due to social norms centered around ways that a new mother should look and act, a woman often chooses to become a mother and tends to portray herself to the world by abiding by these norms (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991). Yet, doing so can place a great deal of pressure on her, thereby making the transition to motherhood even more challenging than it inherently is.

In this section, four issues that are important in considering a new mother's resulting identity are discussed. The first concerns the pressure that participants feel about their ability to handle motherhood. The second issue is the notion that while there is pressure to be "supermom," most participants suggest that they feel a sense of belonging and camaraderie with other mothers. In addition to this, the third includes how consumption behaviors evolve for participants once they become mothers. Finally, the idea that their identities are not fixed during the transition to motherhood, but rather, are extremely fluid and flexible is discussed.

Super Mom

Participants in this study often talked about how nicely they were treated when expecting. Melinda says, "the last month I was just wearing big knit shirts but you know at that point people are still nice to you and they're busy telling you you look gorgeous." However, once the baby is born, the focus of others shifts from the mother to the baby. It seems that there is an appreciation of the pregnant body in our society, but once the mother has her baby, body size norms immediately become the expectation. Christina

discusses how difficult it is to see her friends who have just had babies because they look skinny and she thinks that she still looks pregnant. Christina uses her friends as looking-glasses and bases her view of herself on her comparison with them.

Christina: Having had the same group of friends throughout my life, I would have to say, yes, I have always compared myself to my friend's bodies. And the fact that they're all beautiful and size 0's has always made me insecure, being a larger size, even when I was at a good size for my own body type.

Christina sees these "others" as skinny and herself as large, therefore she feels "less than" adequate as a mother. As a result, Christina views motherhood as difficult and frustrating.

The pressure of motherhood can also be seen in terms of the ways that participants use their appearances to adapt to specific situations. A study by Hunt and Miller (1997) found that young women recognize and adhere to strict rules of dress in formal situations. Findings from the current study confirm this for new mothers as well; however, while new mothers may dress more formally for certain situations, the rules of dress tend to be somewhat relaxed. For example, Lily discussed feeling like she has to dress nice when attending bookclub because her friends do. Teresa feels pressure at work to look professional, and Andrea enjoys dressing for church because she is allowed the opportunity to dress more formally than she normally does at home. However, as Teresa pointed out "Although, even though I try to look professional, I'm sure no one will mind if I wear elastic pants for a few more weeks." Christina uses a little sarcasm when describing her attempt to dress up when going out by saying, "Well, you know, I do try to look nice when I go out. I mean I throw on a cardigan and everything!" Thus, it is clear

that even though participants adhere to basic dress rules when in public, they are more lenient with themselves and find that the rules are more negotiable during the postpartum period.

Participants did not point to specific others as the source of the pressure to “do-it-all.” Instead, they talked about it as a kind of cohesive societal message, one that implies that women in general need to succeed at everything they do. For new mothers, this pressure directly relates to the disconnect that exists between the actual self and ideal self. That is, the new mother may want to be able to “do-it-all,” but various factors prevent her from doing so. However, it is interesting to note that, at the same time, many participants also believe that society is a little more understanding when it comes to expectations on new mothers.

We’re All in this Together

Comparison is obviously a major part of social interaction during the transition to motherhood, especially because new mothers often gravitate toward other new mothers, and compare themselves to these others in order to learn more about their own identities. However, while comparison does play a role in understanding identity (Festinger, 1954), findings from this study indicate that among new mothers, there is less competition and negative comparison and more *communitas*, or feelings of camaraderie. Turner and Turner (1978) discussed the idea of *communitas*, which is essentially a sense of intimacy that develops among people who experience liminality as a group. The majority of participants in this study discussed joining Mommy and Me groups in order to meet other new mothers, and to share their experiences of motherhood with those who are

experiencing it at the same time. While they may compare themselves to these other mothers, the focus of the comparison seems to be on learning and growing instead of judging. For example, Andrea learned about the possibilities of nursing covers from other new mothers.

Andrea: Just a couple of days ago at Mommy and Me Yoga, one of the girls had a nursing cover that was just amazing. I was like “wow! I’ve never seen that or heard of that.” I mean I’ve heard of them before but my biggest hang up was like how can you even see when latching on and holding a blanket and doing all this stuff. So that has made my wardrobe completely different now that I have this nursing cover that makes it not so difficult to nurse.

Instead of comparing herself to the other new mothers and feeling bad because she did not know how to use a nursing cover, Andrea decided to try one and ended up enjoying her purchase.

In a similar vein, Nicolson (1999) and Lewis and Nicolson (1998) suggest that postpartum women feel as though they are not able to mourn losses that they have experienced because the social expectation to be a “happy” new mother is so powerful. Although this expectation may still be quite prevalent, it seems that perhaps it may be lessening a little, given that many of the participants in this dissertation were very comfortable discussing the hard parts of motherhood with each other and with me, someone who was a relative stranger.

Gjerdingen et al. (2009) found that mothers with strong social relationships are better able to deal with and enjoy the postpartum period than mothers without strong relationships. However, based on the findings in this dissertation, it seems that participants with strong social relationships had an equally hard time adjusting to

motherhood as those who did not have a support system to help them. For example, Lane stated, “I’ve got Brandon, my mom, my dad, my brother, my in-laws, friends, neighbors, all who will help me, but it’s still really hard to do everything.” In contrast, Melinda had just moved to a new state when she had her baby and therefore had no family, other than her spouse, nearby. When asked if it was hard to take care of her baby without family nearby, she replied:

Melinda: Um, he’s still little and sleeps a lot, so I don’t know, I don’t really need too much help right now I guess. Maybe at night when he wakes up all the time, but I’m the one feeding him, so no one can really help with that.

It appears that strong social relationships may not be a clear predictor of the ease with which a new mother will transition.

Consumption and Possessions

The interpretation of the data suggests that while consumption can help with the transition to motherhood, it can only do so to a certain extent. Although consumption is seen as an outlet for some participants, as it allows them to leave the house and engage in the world around them, there are extenuating circumstances, such as feeling overwhelmed, suffering from lack of sleep, baby messes, and changes in lifestyle, that mean consumption can only do so much for new mothers. Keri, Teresa, and Lane all mentioned that they enjoyed shopping while their babies napped. Teresa explained that her shopping had increased since becoming a mother saying “You can always find baby stuff!” These participants sometimes find themselves with time on their hands, and, provided that the baby naps, they enjoy browsing through stores. For other participants,

however, consumption came to a grinding halt once they became mothers primarily because household budgets were cut in half.

As findings of this dissertation reveal, the baby becomes part of the mother's extended self (Belk, 1988). Some of the possessions that may communicate this extended self include nursing bras, diaper bags, yoga pants, and nursing covers. Because these items are such an integral part of the motherhood experience, they become a major part of a new mother's identity. Some of the consumption behaviors mentioned by participants that highlight the life-changing intensity of becoming a mother include purchasing what one participant deemed a "professional loungewear" wardrobe, and spending large amounts of time choosing the "perfect" diaper bag. For those who chose to breastfeed, nursing bras are required, even though participants have neither the knowledge or desire to purchase them.

The aforementioned items are all products that would be considered very "motherly" by participants, and as such, are items that have been incorporated as an important part of their identities. Indeed, it seems as though there is much thought that goes into the decision-making process, as participants pondered over whether to purchase nursing tops and bras and new clothing for their postpartum bodies. Decision-making can be difficult for consumers who are purchasing products from a product category that they are unfamiliar with (such as maternity clothing), however, in this case, participants are not only unfamiliar with the products, but they are often uninterested or displeased with having to purchase them (such as nursing bras). They also have to consider how the products facilitate the relationship with the baby. Thus, not only is the individual making

decisions about new and unfamiliar products, but she is doing so with another person in mind (the baby), and considering whether that product will suit the needs of both. Due to the increased difficulty of the decision-making process, some participants find that it is simply easier to avoid focusing on appearance-related products for themselves. Other participants see the benefit in products that help make the transition to motherhood easier. For example, Keri bought new jeans in her pre-baby size as motivation for achieving her pre-baby weight. She stated “I bought jeans recently and they don’t fit great, but I can wear them. I’m using them as motivation though to help me lose the last 5 pounds.” Keri sees her ideal self as a mother wearing these jeans, therefore, purchasing them serves as motivation to help her achieve this self. It also helps ease her transition to motherhood by allowing her to envision a future identity that is more similar to her pre-pregnancy self than her current self.

Fluid, not Fixed

Guy and Banim (2000) found that a woman’s identity is encased in her use of clothing, and as such, there are three possible versions of self relative to this identity: *The woman I want to be*, *The woman I fear I am*, and *The woman I am most of the time*. Based on the interpretation of participants’ experiences presented in Chapters IV-VI, it appears that all three selves are occurring at the same time during the transition to motherhood. While *The woman I want to be* is the new mother’s ideal self, *The woman I fear I am* is usually a slightly more disheveled version of her actual self, and *The woman I am most of the time* is her “at home” self. Findings of this dissertation point to the idea that, because a new mother’s identity is so fluid, she can be all of these women at once.

For example, Lily took her infant to a boutique so that she could go shopping. She did so thinking that she had the situation under control (the woman she wants to be). Then her baby started crying and would not stop. At that point Lily feared that she looked like a new mother who had no idea what she was doing (the woman she fears she is). She left the store and went home to be the woman she is most of the time, which is a stay at home mom. This example shows the fluidity of a new mother's identity, in that she can feel like a put-together, disheveled, and plain mom at the same time.

In conclusion, the interpretation of the data and subsequent findings illustrate the extent to which the experience of becoming a mother is tumultuous to say the least, and because of this, a new mother's identity is constantly in flux. Between lifestyle changes, body shape and size changes, and how one views the self and others around her, the transition to motherhood is typically not a seamless one. However, findings also illustrate that while the transition to motherhood can be a chaotic experience, it can also be navigated in ways that bring about order and which prompt discovery. Using her appearance, or the appearance of her child, a new mother can gain control of the experience and can step out into the world feeling confident. This confidence, in turn, can help her to be confident in her decision-making processes as a new mother. New mothers can also be more laid-back and not worry so much about every little choice, and can demonstrate this ability through the ways they choose to appear to others, or in the ways they want their children to appear to others. Findings indicate that whether by attempting to control or to remain flexible, regarding the experience, all new mothers rely on appearance and consumption to some extent to navigate the new identity terrain.

If behavior is indeed defined by reflective and socially understood meanings (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975) then the reasons that new mothers may dress certain ways and think about their appearances as they do is because other new mothers dress the same way, or because society has suggested that new mothers dress a certain way. Part of the performance that a new mother puts on during face-to-face interactions is based on what she thinks new mothers should do and how they should look. For the new mother who thinks others expect her to be in control of the experience, this performance means that she is showered, wearing makeup with hair done and wearing stylish clothing. For her, appearing in this manner, along with a well-dressed and well-behaved child, is what a new mother “should” look and act like. For new mothers who think others acknowledge that becoming a mother is a life-altering event, and therefore there is more allowance in terms of appearance, the performance may involve wearing the same clothing at home as in public, with the child in plain white onesies all the time.

Regardless of the performance played, this study elucidates the extent to which becoming a mother is a life-altering, intense experience that leaves a woman unsure about her identity. Because becoming a mother happens suddenly, women do not usually have enough time to grasp how their identities have changed. They look to other mothers to help them figure this out, and they use appearance to aid in the process of defining who they are to themselves and others.

The symbolic interactions that new mothers partake in with others are based on appearances, and these interactions create and establish their identities as new mothers (Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962). In fact, perhaps one of the most important things that

help a woman establish her identity as a new mother is other mothers. Participants frequently mentioned the influence that other mothers had on them in terms of learning how to act and look. Participants then purchase or wear clothing, and appear in ways which are similar to these other women. Even though the role of mother may differ in each new mother's mind, one thing is certain: when a woman becomes a mother her identity is reshaped to fit into the role of mother, however she may envision that role.

New mothers must change the way that they dress, look, and shop simply because they are now mothers. Appearing as a trendy mom (or at least not appearing as motherly) can help new mothers to establish their identities, as can shopping for new product categories, such as baby clothing. Being prepared with the right baby gear, such as diaper bags and strollers, and wearing clothing that may be more conservative than she used to wear can also help a woman establish her identity as a new mother. All in all, becoming a mother is a chaotic identity transition, and at times even an identity crisis - but using appearance as a guide can help to make the process a little easier.

Summary

In this chapter, the conceptual relevance of the thematic interpretation was examined, reflecting broad topics that emerged from the interpretation of the data. Findings from this dissertation suggest that becoming a new mother is more of a sudden transformation than a gradual transition and that some new mothers use control as a means to navigate their experience of becoming a mother, while others are more ambivalent about the process. All new mothers experience tension during the transition to motherhood, which in turn results in a fluid and uncertain identity. In the next chapter,

the process used to achieve the study's objectives is examined. Implications of the study's main findings for further research on the topic of motherhood and consumption and motherhood and identity are also explored and discussed.

CHAPTER VIII

REFLECTION AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this study was to understand what it is like to be a new mother, and the role of appearance in this experience. In this dissertation, I sought to understand the lived experiences of new mothers in terms of how they use their appearance to navigate the transition to motherhood. In particular, I explored the ways that participants manage and maintain their identities upon becoming new mothers, and how they think others see them in terms of this identity. As a result, this dissertation addresses a two-fold gap that exists in the literature, as it examines how the identity of a new mother might be developed and conveyed through appearance and what this identity means within the context of new motherhood. Participants' responses highlighted the role of appearance in establishing their identities as new mothers. As this study found, new mothers often place great importance on how they look and on how they think others view them, particularly in terms of how others view them as "mothers." In this chapter, I reflect on the process used to achieve the study's objectives, as well as consider the implications of the study's main findings for further research on the topic of motherhood and consumption and motherhood and identity.

This chapter is comprised of two parts: (1) *Reflecting on the Process*, and (2) *Implications of the Outcomes*. In the first part, I reflect on the research goals and

objectives relative to the process of data collection and interpretation. In the second part, I discuss the main findings that emerged through the interpretation, and provide recommendations based on those findings. I conclude with a discussion of how the limitations of the study point to possibilities for further research.

Reflecting on the Process

In this study, I employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of new mothers. The phenomenological approach allowed me to examine the participants' firsthand experiences with becoming mothers, and to reveal the meanings of the role that appearance plays in these experiences. To understand this phenomenon, I conducted in-depth interviews with 24 new mothers. A snowball sampling technique was used to obtain participants, with initial contact being made through personal acquaintances who were new mothers. Those participants then referred me to other contacts. Before the interviews, each participant was asked to provide examples of ensembles that represented her pre-baby self, post-baby self, and ideal self. These ensembles were used as tools to facilitate conversation about how the participants feel about being new mothers and what their appearances mean to them.

Two focus groups were also conducted for this study. The first focus group was comprised of participants who had already been interviewed for the study. The second focus group was comprised of a group of new mothers who had not previously been interviewed for the study. Although topics discussed during the focus group session were similar to those discussed during the in-depth interviews, focus groups tend to allow for more communal discussion (Kitzinger, 1995). That is, participants were often prompted

by others to discuss issues that they may otherwise not have thought about on their own, therefore, the focus groups provided data that allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the roles that appearance and consumption play during the experience of becoming a new mother.

The participants in this study are all married and between the ages of 26 and 37 years. Most participants are Caucasian, although three Hispanic women participated, along with one Pakistani woman. Prior to motherhood, the majority of participants (14 out of 24) were either teachers, professors, or counselors. There were also four nurses within the group of participants. Nine of the 24 participants decided to become stay-at-home-mothers once their children were born. Given that a snowball sampling method was used to obtain this group of participants, those who participated in the study were referred based on personal acquaintances. Acquaintances generally share similar backgrounds and interests, therefore it is not unexpected that this group of participants is fairly homogenous. However, while the participants do share similar backgrounds and life experiences, they are varied in terms of their yearly household incomes, which, as it turned out, played an important role in the decision to stay at home or return to work after becoming a mother, as well as relative to consumption-related decisions. Each participant also carries with her unique life experiences, which, in turn, influence her perspective on the experience of becoming a mother, and provide insightful perspectives for the study as a whole.

As a researcher, I immersed myself in the interviews by acting as a sounding board for the participants to share and interpret their experiences with becoming new

mothers. This process was interesting for me because when the interviews first took place, I had become a mother myself only three years before. When I thought I could not possibly immerse myself in motherhood any further, I found myself knee-deep in exploring the experiences of other new mothers. It was a constant struggle to remind myself that I was the researcher and not a participant. For example, participants constantly wanted to share information about becoming new mothers and ask me questions about the experience as well. I often had to remind myself that I was the interviewer, not the one being interviewed, and that I did not need to share every life experience that I have had regarding becoming a mother. This was a difficult process, but at the same time, an enriching one. I established bonds with some of the participants, and feel that because I had been through the same experience, they were often more open to sharing their experiences with me.

When conducting qualitative research, the interviewer brings his or her own perspectives and life experiences to the process (Kvale, 1996). I happened to have shared the experience of new motherhood with participants, therefore I constantly reminded myself to keep this in mind, especially during interpretation of the data, when it was easy to bring my own set of life experiences to bear. In other words, I had to bracket my own opinions and experiences (Husserl, 1931) and let the participant's comments and stories form the basis of the interpretation. I communicated with some of the participants while developing the interpretation as a sort of "member check" to ensure the emerging themes were credible and made sense.

Another challenge with interviewing this particular group of participants was that it was very difficult to schedule meeting times. New mothers often rely on their babies to dictate their schedules, and because of this, pinpointing a particular time to meet was difficult. Once I did meet with the new mother, if her baby was with her during the interview, interruptions often took place due to crying, a required feeding, or a required diaper change. I also felt as if some of the participants were not fully involved in the interview process, but instead were constantly checking on the baby. Obviously, as new mothers, they were still dealing with the newness of their babies. These interruptions however, were expected, and perhaps are one of the reasons that studies about this population are lacking overall in academic research. It is my hope that this dissertation addresses and helps to fill this void.

Overall, blending data collected from the in-depth interviews and focus groups, as well as incorporating the wardrobe examples into the study helped to address the objectives of the research, as one type of data served to enhance the other. In addition, the phenomenological approach taken to address the study's research purpose and objectives proved to be the most appropriate method for understanding this phenomenon. The in-depth interviews allowed for a deep understanding of what it means to become a new mother and how appearances are used in the process. The focus groups allowed for participants to address issues they may not have brought up on their own. Finally, the wardrobe examples provided a visual cue for further discussion about what it means to become a new mother, in terms of how she views herself and how she wants others to view her.

Each participant has her own unique experiences, however each is also part of the larger whole of the sample, which was a group of women who had become mothers for the first time and were trying to establish their identities in the role. As a result of interpreting the individual experiences and the overall experience (as created by considering the individual experiences as a whole), three conceptual areas were defined. Shaped by the experiences of the participants, each conceptual area explores what the data mean for addressing the purpose and objectives of the study. As discussed in Chapter III, the conceptual areas, in the case of this dissertation, were constructed as a series of concentric circles, with the mother in the center. The first “circle” considered the mother and her sense of self (i.e. Who am I?). The second “circle” examined the relationship between the mother and her child, in terms of what the baby means for the new mother’s identity. The third and outermost “circle” explored the relationship between the mother, baby, and others, specifically regarding the role that others play in the new mother’s identity development. I then considered the interpretation within the three circles relative to the relevant literature and conceptual framework that guided the study. This approach allowed me to highlight and discuss the larger implications of the study’s findings, regarding the main concepts that already exist (or do not exist) in the literature. Given the lack of research on motherhood, identity, and appearance, this dissertation provides a means of addressing large gaps in the literature. By addressing these gaps in the literature, we understand more (and can make inferences) about how appearance-related consumption plays a role, not only in how a new mother establishes her identity, but how she does so as a result of her interactions with the world around her.

Implications of the Outcomes

Phoenix, Woollett, and Lloyd (1991) suggest that the transition to motherhood is an important adult development stage, to the extent that it provides a woman with a marker of identity as a woman and as an adult. However, based on participant experiences, it seems that many new mothers instead feel as though they lose their identity during the transition to motherhood, or at least misplace it. As articulated throughout this dissertation, during the first six months of a child's life, the new mother's identity is still transitioning, and will inevitably continue to do so. However, many new mothers feel stuck in the identity transition. The result is that they often refer back to the "normal" self or "old" self when discussing the new identity. For many of the participants, it is as though they are unable to articulate who they believe their ideal selves to be and what those selves look like, therefore they refer to the pre-baby self as the "normal" self. Given that their pre-baby identities are what they are most familiar with, it is natural that participants would refer back to it, and do so by comparing their current appearances with their own pre-baby selves rather than that of other new mothers. Indeed, most of their ideal self ensembles were either pre-baby clothes or full outfits depicted on Pinterest, and not actually comprised of pieces in their wardrobes. Moreover, it is also clear that participants often use other new mothers as a means of comparison when figuring out their own identities.

Some participants in this study immediately acknowledged the role that appearance plays in the transition to new motherhood, while others did not see the role clearly at first. Interestingly, most participants began the interviews by discussing

appearance on a superficial level, for example, saying that they would like to look nice as a new mother but do not have the time. However, by the end, participants were often very surprised to realize how important appearance is to them and the important role that appearance plays in the shaping of their identities as new mothers. It was fascinating for me to watch them as they realized the extent to which their appearance plays a key part in how they interact with others, and, more importantly, how they feel about themselves as new mothers. The face-to-face interactions that the participants engage in, and the performances that they put on as new mothers, are indeed guided in large part by how they look, how they feel about how they look, and how they think others view the way they look.

One of the more interesting findings that can be derived from the study is that many new mothers express a need to feel in control of “the situation.” For example, a new mother may need to be organized, or have her home orderly and neat, or leave the house wearing makeup and nice clothing, in order to feel in control of the experience of motherhood. This control can be seen in participants’ ideal self outfits – usually comprised of matching pieces pulled together into a complete ensemble. It seems that many new mothers are very overwhelmed by the experience of becoming a mother, and desire to control any aspect of life that they can. Being in control helps them feel more confident and competent as new mothers. If a new mother can go out in public looking put-together, then she feels as though others will view her as a competent mother, or one who has everything “under control.”

However, sometimes the new mother will lose control. This often happens when her baby decides that it is hungry, sleepy, or generally unhappy for whatever reason, and it starts crying. At home, the new mother can handle it, but she cannot always stay at home. Indeed, new mothers often need to run quick errands, but due to the layout of the store or the checkout process, the errand takes longer than expected, and the baby gets upset and the new mother feels her control of the situation slipping away. It is during times like these that retailers would greatly benefit from providing nursing rooms for mothers, wide aisles to accommodate strollers, and convenient checkout and return processes. If a new mother is able to take a break while shopping and have a private place to feed her child, then she may be able to continue shopping afterward and complete her purchase. Several comments within the interpretation chapters highlight these concerns. For example, Lily does not feel comfortable feeding her baby in the dressing room of a store, so she will leave when her baby gets hungry. Wide aisles would better accommodate strollers and prevent retailers from losing customers who cannot successfully complete their shopping tasks in the store. Abby's frustration about this issue was clear when she stated, "And don't even get me started on trying to fit my stroller through stores!" Others discussed how strategic they have to be when planning a shopping trip, and how the trips have to be quick, so that the baby remains in a good mood and does not start crying. Indeed, on the whole, shopping has to be fast for new mothers. Providing easy in-store navigation and streamlined checkout and return processes is key.

Another interesting finding from this study is that, whereas some new mothers may feel the need to be in control of the motherhood experience, other new mothers are more ambivalent about it. The latter group does not place as much emphasis on looking nice when leaving the house or on the behavior of their children in public. Generally, these mothers view the new motherhood experience as temporary, in terms of how their bodies look and in terms of how they feel about them. Their ideal self ensembles consisted of pre-baby outfits. Many of the participants who talked about being more laid-back about their appearances seem to appreciate the fact that they can wear very casual clothing all of the time. They feel that they had a valid reason for being able to do so, and are taking advantage of it. Yet, inevitably they will come to realize that they cannot wear yoga pants and sweatshirts all of the time and in every social setting. Thus, even though the maternity wear industry is booming, it would greatly benefit retailers to also offer stylish casual clothing to new mothers, as this study revealed the extent to which this group of consumers is excluded from the marketplace. Throughout the thematic interpretation chapters, participants like Christina and Brie described their closets as unhappy places because they could not fit into their pre-baby clothing, yet did not want to wear maternity clothing, or purchase new clothing to wear out in public or to work. For new mothers who breastfeed, the clothing choices are extremely limited. Keri mentioned not being able to find shirts that fit her and look cute, and Melinda talked about how she gets tired of wearing t-shirts and old sweaters because other alternatives are not available in the marketplace. Clearly, if designers, retailers, and marketers worked together to create and promote clothing that was specifically for the postpartum period, and was

stylish, comfortable, and easy to care for, new mothers would be more satisfied with the choices available in the marketplace, and perhaps their actual and ideal selves could become more congruent, alleviating some of the identity-based tension they clearly feel.

Indeed, it is very apparent based on findings of this study that new mothers, as a consumer segment, are basically ignored in the marketplace. Although the maternity wear industry is a large one, as is women's clothing in general, there is nothing available specifically in terms of clothing for women who are transitioning to motherhood. As the data suggest, many new mothers put a great deal of pressure on themselves to look put-together when in public with their children. It is very difficult for a woman to do this, however, when she cannot find clothing that is conducive to breastfeeding, or that fits her immediate postpartum body shape and size, or that looks trendy and attractive, yet is comfortable and functional. Thus, it would be wise for retailers and marketers to provide lines of clothing that satisfy this target market's needs. As this dissertation revealed, clothing that is conducive to breastfeeding, that flatters the postpartum body's size and shape, and that is easy to care for and comfortable, while still being on trend, would have a lot of appeal among new mothers.

In addition to the above suggestions, providing convenient placement of goods in stores, from baby products to women's clothing would also benefit new mothers. As revealed through the interpretation of data, new mothers are making product choices that they are unfamiliar with, and so they need a bit more time to make decisions. Making it easier to find these products would certainly aid the process. Leaving the house is already a challenge for a new mother, given that she is anxious about how to navigate the

world with her child. If retailers could make her experiences a bit more streamlined, quick, and easy, this would benefit both parties. For example, Christina and Emma both discussed how they shop for clothing at Target, which is a store that provides almost everything they need. The reason they both do this is because it is convenient, they do not have to search for products for a long time because they already know where they are, and this makes their shopping trips faster. Lily, who struggled with finding a nursing bra, said that part of the reason she did not enjoy purchasing this product was because her baby was with her and got fussy. She had never purchased this product before and therefore needed more time to make a decision, yet had difficulty figuring out where the nursing bras were located in the store. The baby started fussing and she had to leave quickly, choosing a garment that she did not like. Simple things like easier access to postpartum products would actually go a long way toward helping a new mother navigate the transition to motherhood and would, at the same time, benefit retailers through sales and perhaps even loyalty.

In terms of academic research, it would be valuable to examine the topic in light of whether a woman's professional role changes upon becoming a new mother. Findings from this study indicate that those participants who enjoyed wearing casual clothing, and who were less concerned about how others viewed them, most often were those who had decided to quit their jobs and stay at home upon having the baby. Researching this topic would provide more information concerning the role that careers play relative to appearance during the postpartum period and what it means in terms of one's profession and one's identity as a new mother.

Many participants view the transition to motherhood as temporary, specifically in terms of their body size and shape changes. However, it would be useful to explore how mothers feel about body size and shape further along in the motherhood journey, and at what point the new mother realizes that ambivalence about her appearance cannot go on indefinitely. Body dissatisfaction was found to be an important factor in how the new mothers in this study viewed their identities, and therefore is a topic that warrants further investigation. Many new mothers accept that their bodies will be different immediately after having a baby, but an understanding of the point where they begin to get frustrated with these changes, and the factors that lead to the frustration, would shed light on body dissatisfaction and its role in identity development.

Data for this dissertation were collected with participants who had recently had a baby (within 6 months). While this segment of consumers offers insight into appearance, new motherhood, and consumption, given the extent to which findings from this study indicate that a new mother's identity is in flux, it makes sense to conduct research on mothers further along in the motherhood journey. There likely are different sets of challenges at different points along the way, and since mothers are a large consumer segment with much spending power, it would be wise to understand their needs and desires and consider addressing them in the marketplace. Further, the focus of the study was on first time mothers. The role that appearance plays for mothers who have more than one child or mothers with children who are older (e.g., primary school age) is important to study. Given the difference in life stage, it is likely that the motherhood experience would vary from that of first time mothers.

Finally, because much discussion surfaced throughout the interpretation of data regarding general unhappiness with the lack of clothing available to new mothers, research exploring specific clothing attributes that new mothers desire would be both enlightening and beneficial to marketers and retailers seeking to target this group of consumers. Researching the specific clothing attributes that new mothers desire would add value to our knowledge of postpartum clothing design and function. A study focusing on the specific clothing attributes that a new mother desires would help designers create garments that could be sold to new mothers to satisfy their needs that are obviously not being met by the current marketplace offerings.

In addition to suggesting further research on new mothers with children older than six months of age, and on mothers with more than one child, another suggestion for future research would be to conduct a study on new motherhood and appearance and consumption using a more diverse sample. All participants in the current study are married, all well-educated, and the majority are Caucasian. A diverse sample would provide more in-depth knowledge about the topic as it would provide a different set of experiences. Finally, while the present study used certain garments as visual prompts to discuss the participant's wardrobe, a more concise wardrobe analysis would be suggested. For example, it would be interesting to examine what mothers do with maternity clothing and postpartum clothing. This would provide knowledge about the disposal stage of the consumption process, and it would provide more understanding of the significance this clothing has for mothers.

Based on the findings of this dissertation, it appears that participants turn to their immediate worlds of friends and family upon becoming mothers. For example, Melinda moved to another state before having her child and therefore has had to rely solely on her spouse for support. Keri, too, lives away from her family, but finds support at her gym and amongst other mothers. On the other hand, Diedre is very close to her family and lives near most of them, allowing her to rely on various family members for babysitting and social activities. By examining the importance of others in a woman's transition to motherhood through the application of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgical terms, this dissertation helps expand our overall knowledge about and understanding of the critical issues of motherhood and identity from an academic perspective. Findings reveal how new mothers navigate social encounters via their front and back stage behaviors and appearance and include the role of the baby in terms of these social interactions. This factor of integrating babies into defining identity through interaction has not been talked about in research on impression management. Yet according to this study, it plays a very important role in this process, as well as in the way that new mothers shop and what they buy.

This study has helped extend our existing knowledge of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy to include how these concepts can be used to interpret the meanings that a new mother assigns to her appearance. For example, some participants suggested that certain garments, such as nursing bras or yoga pants, made them feel ugly or frumpy, and therefore such interpretations of being a mother were incorporated into their identities as new mothers. Whether they realized it or not, many participants also were adept at

understanding the “definition of the situation” (Thomas, 1928) for various potential interactions. Many were able to prepare for these interactions using appearance and in turn, felt more confident as mothers. For example, Andrea realized that people often want to look at her baby when she takes him out in public, so she anticipates this and dresses herself more formally in order to feel like a good mother. Andrea is skilled at predicting which situations would arise when in public with her baby, so she controls her appearance to help her deal with them. By doing this, she makes herself feel in control, and incorporates these feelings of control into her identity as a mother.

The findings from this dissertation also add to our overall knowledge of symbolic interactionism and dramaturgy in defining identity. While Goffman’s (1959) notions of front stage and back stage behavior did hold true for some participants, in general, given the tumultuousness of new motherhood, it would be fair to say that many participants enacted backstage behavior while on the front stage. This means that some participants may want to look nice in public, but realize that due to the time and energy limitations of new motherhood, they simply have to accept that sometimes, when in public, they look exactly like they do at home. In addition to this, findings from this dissertation also suggest that the front stage and back stage should be thought of in terms of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Thinking about these two dramaturgical locations along a continuum makes it easier to understand how, in some cases (such as new motherhood) back stage and front stage behaviors can blend together, thereby pointing to further avenues of exploration using Goffman’s (1959) notion of performance.

In conclusion, the transition to motherhood is a turbulent and fascinating one. It became apparent through this dissertation that no new mother can fully prepare herself for this transition. The lack of sleep associated with having a new baby, along with the physical, psychological, and emotional changes and challenges it brings, combine to create a very tumultuous time for a woman. This study illustrates the extent to which how a new mother not only looks, but feels about how she looks during this transition plays a very important role in how she views her identity as a new mother. If she can present a put-together image in public, then she may feel more competent as a new mother. If she feels comfortable wearing more casual clothing and appearing “less than perfect,” then she may feel more laid-back about her new role. Whether a new mother strives to appear in control or go-with-the-flow, her identity as a new mother is largely impacted by her appearance. Consequently, findings of this dissertation further establish the importance of the relationship between clothing and identity as well as the relationship between motherhood, identity, and consumption.

Becoming a mother is a very private experience that happens to be enacted in a very public way. A new mother feels as though everyone’s eyes are on her and judging every decision that she makes in her new role. The primary concern of most new mothers is that the baby is well taken care of. However, the way others perceive a new mother’s ability to do this is also of concern. If she can look neat and stylish when in public, then she feels that others will view her as a successful mother, and, in turn, her identity as a new mother is positively confirmed. However, if she goes out in public looking messy and unkempt, she may feel that others are judging her as a disheveled,

“bad” mother, and her identity is then negatively confirmed. Thus, the way that a new mother looks, and how and what she consumes, helps her create and manage her performance of this new role. As this dissertation has shown, becoming a mother for the first time is both joyful and entirely overwhelming. Through an in-depth understanding of the experience, the uncertainty of the transition can be managed through tools like appearance in order to come to terms with the role, and ultimately to help women embrace their newly formed identities.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. When did you have your baby?
2. How do you feel about your new role as a mother? What is the best part? The worst part?
3. Tell me about how you feel about how you look? Is there a particular image you try to portray as a mother?
4. Has appearance been important to you in the past? How does it play a role in your life now?
5. In what ways does clothing/appearance enter into your life? Has this changed now that you are a mother? If so, how? If not, why?
6. Do you enjoy shopping for clothing now? Why or why not?
7. How do you feel about your body size/shape? Has this changed now that you are a mother?
8. Do these feelings influence the clothing you buy and wear? If so, explain.
9. Have you used clothing to alter your mood? If so, in what ways?
10. How do you feel about dressing for work or going out, versus staying at home?
11. Is age important to how you dress? If so, is it more important than being a mother?
12. Was there a certain time/place that you realized a difference in the way you dress now that you are a mother?
13. Did you breastfeed your baby? If so, for how long?
14. In general, how do you feel about breastfeeding?
15. Does/did breastfeeding impact your clothing choices during this time? Please explain.

16. Are there any styles or brands that you will/will not buy or wear? Why or why not?
17. When you get dressed, do you consider any one's opinions regarding what you wear? Why or why not?
18. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you think is important that I know?

Wardrobe Interview Schedule

Pre-baby Self:

1. Please tell me about the ensemble you selected to represent your pre-baby self.
2. How did you feel when wearing it?
3. Do you dress differently now than before you were a mother? If so, do you miss your old clothes? Why or why not?
4. Have you kept many of your pre-baby clothes/accessories? Why or why not?

Post-baby Self:

1. Please tell me about the ensemble you selected to represent your post-baby self.
2. How do you feel when wearing it?
3. Can you talk about the last clothing purchase that you made? (What did you buy? Where did you buy it? Why did you buy it?)
4. Do you shop at the same stores or channels (online) now that you are a new mother? Why or why not?
5. Have your expectations of clothing changed, now that you are a mother? If so, in what way?
6. Has anything changed about the kind of clothing you buy? Explain.

Ideal Self:

1. Please tell me about the ensemble you selected to represent your ideal self.
2. How do you feel about it?
3. Is it important to you (or a goal) to achieve this particular look? Why or why not?

Is there anything about any of these outfits that we didn't talk about that you think I should know?

Demographic Questions

Name: _____

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Occupation: _____

Education:

_____ Less than High School

_____ High School/GED

_____ Some college

_____ 2 year degree

_____ 4 year degree

_____ Masters degree

_____ Doctoral degree

_____ Professional degree

Household Income:

_____ Under \$19,999

_____ \$20,000-\$39,999

_____ \$40,000-\$59,999

_____ \$60,000-\$79,999

_____ \$80,000-\$99,999

_____ \$100,000+

Marital Status

_____ Single, never been married

_____ Married

_____ Separated

_____ Divorced

_____ Widowed

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

1. Has shopping for clothing, makeup, etc. changed now that you're a mother? Explain.
2. Has your beauty routine changed now that you're a mother? Explain.
3. How would you describe the transition to motherhood?
4. Does your actual identity as a mother and ideal identity as a mother differ?
5. What does the ideal mother look like today?
6. What are the best and worst parts about looking like a mother? Explain.
7. Who here is satisfied with her body? Why or why not?
8. Are there relationships in your life that factor into how you look or how you want to look?
9. Describe the wearing, buying, avoiding, or pursuing of any specific garments now that you are a mother.
10. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss concerning appearances, clothing, etc. as a new mother?

APPENDIX C

IRB CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Appearance and the Transition to Motherhood: An Exploration of Consumption and Identity Construction

Principal Investigator: Dr. Nancy Hodges

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to examine the role that appearance plays in the transition to motherhood.

Why are you asking me?

I am asking you to participate because as a new mother, your perspectives on the role that appearance plays during the transition into motherhood will provide unique insight into the topic.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

You will be asked to be interviewed regarding your perceptions of your identity as a new mother and how appearance, specifically clothing, plays a role in this new identity. On agreement to be interviewed, the interview will last approximately 1-2 hours. Prior to the interview I will ask you to put together three ensembles from your current wardrobe: one representing your pre-baby self, one representing your post-baby self, and one representing your ideal self. Makeup, shoes, and accessories should be considered in each ensemble. I will also ask you to be available for a review of your interview transcript once complete. This review will take approximately 1 to 2 hours. In addition to the interview, you will be asked if you would like to volunteer to participate in a focus group session on the same topic. The focus group session will take approximately 1-2 hours as well.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Digital audio recording will be used to ensure reliability of data collected and to capture your perspectives on appearances as a new mother. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid from:

2/2/15 to 2/1/16

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. As stated above, there is a slight risk of a breach of confidentiality. Also, due to the nature of the focus group, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, the student researcher will ask that people not discuss outside the focus group what was discussed in the focus group. Measures that will be implemented to minimize this risk are described in the confidentiality section below.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Dr. Nancy Hodges who may be reached at (336) 256-0291 or njnelson@uncg.edu, or Victoria Brown at (540) 588-0185 or vsbrown@uncg.edu. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

Your participation may help to shed light on the change in identity that new mothers experience and the role that appearance, specifically clothing, plays in helping to facilitate this change and in expressing this new identity.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to participants of this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information confidential?

Consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Principal Investigator's campus office, audio files will be password protected, and participants will not be identified by name when data are disseminated. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Consent forms will be kept for three years after the close of the study and destroyed by shredding. Audio files will be kept password protected on the student researcher's home computer for a minimum of five to a maximum of seven years upon completion of the study, after which point the files will be erased. There will be a file linking participants' identities to pseudonyms that will be used in published materials. This file will be kept separate from the data and will be erased no more than seven years after the close of the study.

Due to the nature of the focus group, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. However, the student researcher will ask that people not discuss outside the focus group what was discussed in the focus group.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid from:
2/2/15 to 2/1/16

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Victoria Brown.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form
Valid from:
2/2/15 to 2/1/16